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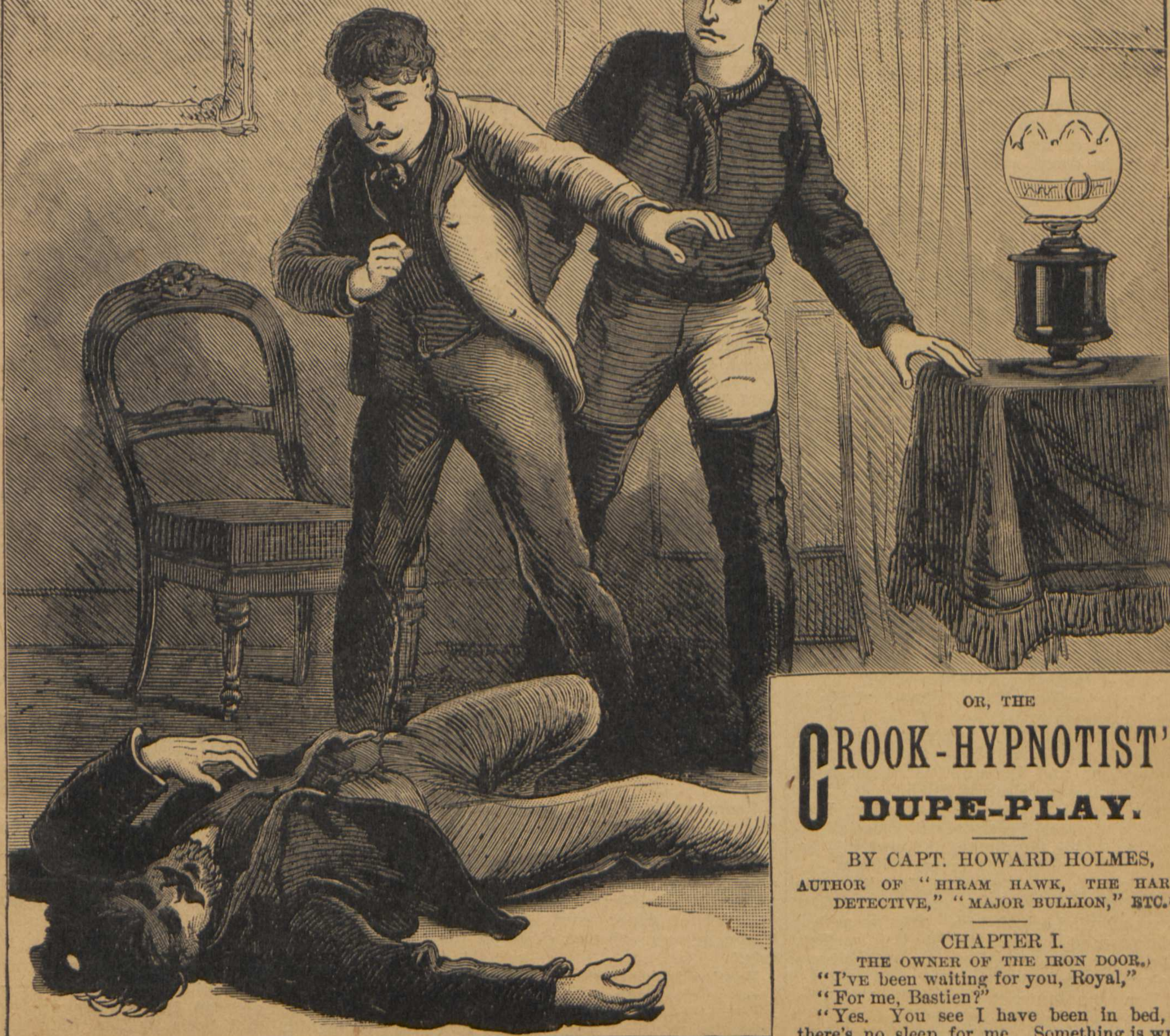
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GEN. HAWK KEENE'S RIGHT BOWER



"I FEARED THAT SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED. MY GOD! HE IS DEAD!"

OR, THE

PROOK-HYPNOTIST'S DUPE-PLAY.

BY CAPT. HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HIRAM HAWK, THE HARLEM
DETECTIVE," "MAJOR BULLION," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE OWNER OF THE IRON DOOR.

"I've been waiting for you, Royal,"

"For me, Bastien?"

"Yes. You see I have been in bed, but
there's no sleep for me. Something is wrong
with Raymond. I feel it here," and the speaker

laid his hand upon his heart. "You've been to the 'gym,' and I've been waiting for you an hour. We will go and see."

"To the house?"

"Where else, man? You saw him this morning, but many things can happen in an hour."

A great many people knew that Bastien Blue was half-brother to one of the strangest men in New York.

Bastien was a young man, not past twenty-eight, handsome and athletic. The place he occupied had been given to him by this half-brother, and he lived in excellent style there, with Royal Flush, a man two years his senior, to keep him company and obey his every wish.

Bastien Blue was somewhat of a sport; that is, he frequently took trips up the river to the estate called "Green Lodge," also the property of his half-brother, and there he remained for weeks, while Royal Flush, his factotum, occupied the fine house in town and had things pretty much his own way.

Nobody interfered with these arrangements, and Bastien Blue never asked Royal what he did during his absences.

The half-brothers were not very often together, owing, it was said, to the vagaries of Raymond, the elder of the two. He lived quite alone in a three-story house, very narrow and very old.

Raymond Rolfe was a chemist and a man who kept himself secluded from the world, though that had not prevented the police from looking after him a little, as we shall see.

He was rich, had made money somewhere and somehow, and this is what once got him into trouble with the Metropolitan police, for there was a time when a lot of bogus Brazilian bonds were floated, and, as Raymond Rolfe had traveled through South America, and had come home very rich and the possessor of many secrets, the authorities thought he knew something about the bonds, hence a chapter in his life which few people know.

Bastien Blue and his factotum, Royal Flush, seemed to care but very little for this man of mystery, who remained behind his doors experimenting with his chemicals, or shut up in his laboratory, which had a door destined to play no unimportant part in our story.

Bastien seldom called on Rolfe, though he had the entree to the strange house at all times—even carried a key which he seldom used—being content, as it were, to let Raymond live as he pleased so long as his eccentricities did not interfere with woodcock shooting up the river or other sports.

It was a somewhat blustery night in October when Bastien Blue, who had waited until near midnight for Royal Flush's return from the gymnasium, told him his fears.

A little rain had fallen, the stones were damp, and the high wind, sweeping down the street, rattled the loose shutters on the oldest houses.

"I can't sleep until I know that he is safe," continued Bastien, who had robbed himself for a jaunt through the shower. "You needn't wait to put on anything better than you are wearing. A minute may mean much. I feel it all the time at my heart. You are wearing your 'gym' suit and that seems comfortable."

"It is," smiled Royal Flush. "Only it isn't a street garb."

"Pish, man! Who is going to criticise us to-night? Come! I say there's no time to be lost, and I'm anxious to get back and catch some sleep if I can."

The pair left the house together, Bastien in advance, his well-built figure showing up in the lamplight, and watched by Royal like a man in a maze.

"I never heard of anything like this before," said the factotum, as the first gust of wind struck him. "He never has shown much concern for his half-brother, the crazy Rolfe; but perhaps things have taken a turn. We'll see."

For ten minutes the two walked rapidly, when their destination was reached.

"Here we are," said Bastien, springing

up a flight of stone steps in front of a narrow three-story dwelling, now wholly darkened. "Everything is as quiet as the grave, and if he's living he must be abed."

The young man took a key from his pocket and was inserting it in the door when the portal, not entirely closed, swung open.

"Heavens! Do you see this?" he cried, turning to his companion. "It wasn't locked, and at this time of night!"

They entered the hall, a long corridor, and Bastien pointed toward a door from which seemed to proceed a streak of light that lay on the carpet of the hall.

"He's up," said Flush; "we will find him all O. K."

"I don't know," answered Bastien, with a shake of the head. "I am almost afraid to open that door. Up, and in the room yonder at this time of the night? If he were in the laboratory upstairs on the third floor, I wouldn't think so much of it, but in there—open the door, Royal."

The factotum did so and stepped back to let his master enter the chamber first.

They were confronted by a sight which was startling enough to unnerve them.

The room was not large, but was well furnished, boasting of a high ceiling, and well carpeted. At one side stood a table, upon which was a large lamp, whose light shed a cheerful glow over the apartment.

"I told you so," cried Bastien, stopping short the moment he crossed the threshold, and then he gave Royal a quick glance. "I feared that something had happened. My God! He is dead!"

He stood over a man who was lying on the floor, his body half drawn up and his hands half open.

The face was sallow and foreign in looks, the results of a residence in warm climates, and the eyes had the stare of the dead.

It was a strangely handsome face as the light revealed it; the chin was well formed, the cheeks none too fleshy, and the whole contour bespoke intelligence of a superior order and a correct life.

But there was a look of death in the eyes; not only this, but a look of violent death.

The contortions of the mouth, the head drawn to one side seemed to tell the two men that they stood in the presence of a deep mystery of murder.

Bastien, who had dropped his hat upon entering, half bent over the body and stared at it with a white face, while Royal Flush, habited in his odd-looking gymnasium suit, remained slightly in the background and waited for his master to speak again.

"You know the house as well as I do," said Bastien. "Run upstairs and see if the laboratory door is open."

"The keyless one?"

"Certainly; the iron portal."

Royal withdrew, leaving Bastien alone with the dead man, but in a moment the factotum came back.

"It is shut," he announced.

"You tried it, did you?"

"Yes, I twisted the knob as best I knew how, but it was as solid as a stone wall."

"We cannot open that door," was the reply. "No one knew the secret of the keyless portal but Raymond, unless he confided it to her."

"To Oriel?"

"Yes, to Oriel. It is not likely that he did so, for he zealously guarded the secrets of the laboratory. Look here, Royal, isn't this blood in his hand?"

The men bent low over the form on the floor.

There was a dark stain in the palm of the right hand and Royal lifted the lamp from the table and held it close.

"It is blood, but there is none elsewhere," he said, looking at Bastien. "There is no stab that I can see, but here is a bit of glass; and here, and here! There are particles of glass on the carpet."

Bastien took one of the bits and held it close to the lamp.

"It looks as if he had crushed something in his hand—was forced to crush

it, I mean. It is as if a little sphere of glass was broken by the closing of the hand; but this is to be sifted by the detectives."

"It is a dark case for them—a case between murder and suicide."

"Suicide?" and Bastien turned upon Royal and transfixed him with a sudden gaze. "Why should he take his life? He had everything he needed to make a man happy, and, though eccentric, as you know, he had unlimited wealth at his command and very few heirs."

There was no reply and the two rose and for the first time scanned the room.

"That looks like a mark, a stain, on the wall yonder," and Royal pointed to a spot on the wall to the right of the table, and not far from where the body lay.

Bastien picked up the lamp and moved forward.

"You are right. There is a stain here—the marks of two fingers and then a splotch like the print of a palm! Could he have staggered against the wall with the wounded hand and in the throes of death?"

It was too deep for Royal Flush and the factotum shook his head.

Bastien began to search the chamber, opening what drawers he could and rummaging the dead man's pockets.

"There ought to be a clew somewhere," said he, pausing for a moment and looking up at Royal. "Maybe these detectives will come and pick up one the first thing!"

"I don't see how they can. There's nothing here but the little particles of glass and the wound in the hand. That wouldn't produce death."

"We don't know. Raymond had at his command all the secrets of toxicology. He knew what would kill with the best of them, and, though he never bruited his learning abroad, he could tell what would take life instantly, or what would give one an hour to settle up his affairs."

"But the open front door?"

"There's something in that. There must be. He always locked the house at night. The person who was with him last didn't lock the door upon going off. The police will have something to start on at least. You see what a presentiment will do now, don't you, boy? I felt that something was wrong in this house."

"What shall we do?"

"This must be known to the authorities at once. The news must go post haste to Mulberry street, and the superintendent shall have a chance to put his fastest ferret upon a warm trail."

Bastien locked the door of the death chamber as he retired and in the hall he stopped and looked upstairs.

"You are sure you tried the iron door, Royal?" he asked.

"With all my might. I found it locked and a door without a keyhole is too much for me."

"He protected the secrets of the laboratory with that iron door," he remarked. "I have never walked across its threshold, and all my desires to pry into its mysteries were cleverly baffled by him. We will look beyond it now. The laboratory may hold the secret of this dark piece of business and the iron door must open to the law. The police will force it, Royal."

Bastien glanced at his watch and saw that it was a quarter-past twelve.

They were about to leave the steps when two persons stepped from a cab which turned suddenly from the street and halted in the gutter.

Bastien and Royal looked at one another in mute astonishment.

One of the pair wore the uniform of a police officer and the other was plainly dressed.

"They've been ahead of us," was all Bastien said, as he caught his companion's eye.

CHAPTER II.

THE LABORATORY'S PRISONER.

The presence at the house of mystery of the policeman and his plainly dressed companion told both Bastien Blue and

Royal Flush that the murder had already been discovered.

"Mr. Blue, I believe," said the officer, as he mounted the step. "I am Sergeant Slipper, and this gentleman is Mr. Keene, of the detective force. You have discovered the existing state of affairs, I presume?"

"We have discovered that Raymond Rolfe lies dead in this house. My coming thither at this time grew out of a presentiment which prevented me from sleeping, and, in order to verify my suspicions, I induced Royal, here, to accompany me. We will go back with you, gentlemen."

Bastien re-opened the door and all entered.

Sergeant Slipper was a man of perhaps fifty, a well informed member of the force, cautious but zealous, and one who had the entire confidence of the chief.

Of his companion, Kimball Keene, or Clew Hawk Keene, but little in the way of introduction need be said. His age was thirty-five, and he had won his stars in more than one apparently clewless case, so the nickname of the Clew Hawk of Gotham was one of which he was justly proud.

Fearless, cunning, good natured, able to find clews where the best of his rivals had given up the game, he had gone from triumph to triumph, winning new laurels whenever he was given a mystery to solve or a victim to catch.

"You have been over the house, I presume?" said Slipper, in the hall.

"We have looked in but few places. We were in the act of notifying the department, but your coming does away with that."

"I ought to tell you that the crime, for crime it seems to be," continued Slipper, looking at Bastien, who leaned against the wall, with his arms folded on his breast "was discovered by Roundsman Clipper, who has gone home for the time laboring under an attack of his old trouble, heart palpitation, which came on while telling his story at the office. He was on his beat when, about ten o'clock, he saw a light in the third story window and noticed the opening and closing of the iron shutter that secures the windows of the laboratory."

"Clipper might not have thought anything of this, for he was acquainted with the vagaries of the deceased, but a moment later he heard a cry which sounded, in part, like a moan, and died away in a horrid—horrid is the word he used—gurggle."

"Even then he did not think of murder, and turned back on his beat. He had gone perhaps twenty yards when, happening to look down the sidewalk, he saw some one standing on the steps out there. The light was not very good, but he made out, as he thought, the figure of a woman."

"On the steps of this house?" asked Bastien.

"Right out yonder, Mr. Blue. Clipper says he is aware that the deceased had a protegee, a young lady whom he has provided for and who lives in Fourteenth street, with a maid and in luxury—"

"Oriel!"

"I believe her name is Oriel, and a right pretty name it is. I am not saying that Oriel was the person seen by Clipper on the steps at ten minutes past ten, but it was a woman. She stood there a while, perhaps five minutes, when she came down and walked briskly away."

"The roundsman did not follow her, but by and by came back in the natural course of duty and tried the door. It was unlocked, and he informs us that he happens to know that Mr. Rolfe was very careful to lock the doors from a desire to amply protect the precious things in the laboratory."

"Clipper then entered the house, to investigate. He found the lamp burning in the room yonder, and, upon entering, made the horrifying discovery which must have startled you."

"Clipper reported the discovery at once, but before he could set out upon his re-

turn to his beat he was taken ill and had to be conveyed home. He'll be all right before morning, as he always is, and then you can hear his story from his own lips. Now, Mr. Keene."

The portly sergeant, who had stood with his back to the door all this time, turned and opened it.

Kimball Keene was the first person of the four to walk in.

The lamp, which had been left as found by the roundsman and by Bastien, shed its light upon the ghastly object lying on the carpet, with the half-clenched hands, and upon the dark, hand-like stain on the wall.

The Clew Hawk of New York did not seem to make more than a superficial examination. He bent over the body and looked at it, opening the hands and taking a survey of position and so forth; then he rose and faced Bastien Blue.

"You have not been all over the house, I believe?" he said.

"I have not. Royal here went up to the laboratory door at my request, and found it closed."

"The iron door the roundsman tells about, which is seemingly without a key-hole."

"Strange to say, it has none at all."

"Then how did your half-brother open it?"

"That is a secret which, like others, he kept to himself."

"One he never imparted to you?"

"Quite true. He never gave even to me the secret of the opening of that iron door."

"Let us go up and look at it."

Bastien Blue led the way and in a few moments they stood before what the light which Bastien had turned on showed was a door of iron—the door to the dead man's laboratory, and when the policeman took hold of the knob he found it immovable, unyielding; and a closer scrutiny showed that, from top to bottom, there was no break or dent in the iron surface.

"When was this door put up?" asked the detective.

"During my absence from the city five years ago, or when he built the laboratory."

"You must have heard the door opened frequently?"

"Now and then, but I had become so accustomed to his vagaries that I never bothered myself about them. Of course, I never asked him how he managed to open the door—I did not consider that any of my affairs; but I do know that he came up here and entered this room by the door before you, despite the fact that it has no key-hole."

"Do you think he ever told Miss Oriel about it?"

"Really, I cannot say, but I don't think she knows any more than I do about the door."

"Have you sent Miss Oriel word of the—the tragedy?" asked Royal Flush, putting in for the first time.

"I believe she still remains in ignorance of it," replied the sergeant. "She will hear of it soon enough, for we may need her in the course of the investigation."

There was now inaugurated a thorough search for means of ingress to the laboratory, sealed, as it were, from all mortal eyes; but the searchers were compelled to stop, baffled as much at the end as at the beginning.

"That room may hold the key to the solution of this crime," said the officer, pointing at the door. "We have authority to open it, in the usual manner if possible, forcibly, if necessary."

The sergeant stepped back a pace and for a moment eyed the refractory portal.

"We will proceed at once, Mr. Keene," he said at last. "A hot trail is always the best, eh? You have been here often, Mr. Blue? Can you find us a battering ram—a sledge or a bar of iron?"

"There is a forge in the cellar and, I think, a sledge hammer."

"Just what we need! Which way, Mr.

Blue?" and the officer started downstairs directed by Bastien.

In a few moments the sergeant returned and unloaded at the door a rusty sledge and a stout iron bar.

Royal Flush, who was a veritable athlete, picked up the former and lifted it above his head.

"He looks like a young lion," said the policeman. "He won't let that door trouble him long. Now, stand back, men, and let Samson have a chance."

As Royal, with a glance at Bastien, stepped back so as to get firmly planted before the door, he saw that the face of Blue was white and ghastly. His eyes seemed to start from his head, and his swollen veins showed plainly on his temples. He seemed to hold his breath, as if much depended on the opening of that stubborn door, and when the first blow was given he appeared lifted off his feet.

Blow after blow Royal rained on the iron barrier, bringing off scales of rust, and shaking it, but not breaking the mysterious lock.

The young man stopped at last and looked at his companions. He was almost exhausted.

"A few more blows will bring it!" cried the sergeant. "We must look beyond that door before we quit this house. The clew may be there."

Royal lifted the hammer once more, after a breathing spell, and this time the door trembled as it had not trembled before.

"There it is!" exclaimed Keene; "we will now take a look into the forbidden room."

The door, knocked loose at last by the tremendous blows which the young Thor had rained upon it, seemed about to fall inward, when the sergeant sprang forward and caught it in both hands.

A strange smell as of spilled chemicals came from the apartment, and Clew Hawk Keene was at the threshold when a voice rang clearly through the corridor that startled every one.

"Stand back! Who are you that you break down a door without authority from any one? Since the death of the master, this house and its contents belong to me!"

In the middle of the sealed chamber, with her beautiful face as white as snow, and her figure drawn up like that of a tragedy queen, stood a young girl, whose gleaming eyes seemed to emit flashes of flame.

"My God!" cried Bastien. "Oriel Orne."

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG GIRL'S ORDEAL.

The fair prisoner of the laboratory made no reply, but looked at the little group who had forced their way into the place.

She was a girl of twenty, with a graceful, willowy figure and a pretty face, now pale as if she were laboring under great excitement.

She stood in the middle of the room, surrounded by shelves well laden with phials of all sizes, and here and there chemical apparatus, crucibles, retorts and the like.

It was a well-equipped laboratory, though small, and from ceiling to floor there was something connected with experiments or the results of science.

The door might have fallen against her if Sergeant Slipper had not caught it in time, but it was evident that she had not tried to avoid the collision.

"You are Miss Orne, I believe," said the sergeant, stepping toward the young girl, to whom he bowed politely.

"I am Oriel Orne," with a swift glance at Bastien Blue, who had spoken the name a moment before.

"We did not expect to find you here, Miss, else we might have proceeded in a different manner."

"That is all right. I suppose you had a right to see what was beyond the broken door, and you have found—me!"

"Oriel!" cried Bastien, "in the name of Heaven how came you here?"

She turned to him her white face and for half a second her deep, searching eyes seemed to transfix him.

"You know what has happened," he went on. "You must know that Raymond is dead below. Ah, you intimated that when you greeted us, commanding us to beware what we did in this room."

"I know."

The ashen lips met firmly and she turned from Bastien Blue and addressed Sergeant Slipper.

"I do not doubt that you have a right to know what is in this room. You belong to the police, and the authorities have a right to all the clues that are to be found to the crime committed underneath this roof."

"But, Oriel, how came you in the laboratory, when it was supposed that none but him knew the secret of the solid door?" demanded Bastien.

"You did not know it, did you?"

"No, no; I thought he was the sole possessor, but your presence here tells us—what else can it tell us?—that he shared it with you."

"You may know in the future. Now, Mr. Officer, the laboratory is at your service, but I fear it will not reward you for your trouble."

Oriel waved her hand toward the shelves and drawers, and stepped to the door.

"One minute, Miss," said Slipper, at a glance from Keene. "If you would be kind enough to remain we will make the search, and, since you know the secret of the iron door, you may forward the cause of justice by assisting us now."

"Just as you say," was the reply, and Oriel came back and took the only chair, a revolving one, in the chamber.

"You have been here before to-night?" queried Keene, addressing the girl for the first time.

"Perhaps."

"You may know something about the contents of this apartment. That is, you may be able to tell us if anything is missing."

At this Oriel Orne started a little and her gaze for a moment fell, while a flush suffused her cheeks.

"He was the secret keeper; you must understand that," she answered. "The true contents of this room were known to him alone, unless his friend, the doctor, shared with him some of his secrets."

"The doctor, Miss?"

Oriel looked again at Bastien.

"Doctor Doom. Mr. Blue has some acquaintance with him, but not enough, perhaps, to say whether he ever became Raymond Rolfe's confidant."

Thus appealed to, Bastien explained that Doctor Doom was a friend of his as well as a visitor to Raymond Rolfe's house; but beyond this he averred that he knew nothing.

Detective Keene, who had a little knowledge of chemistry, went over the phials on the shelves and then looked at the apparatus without going into details.

All the time he was followed by the eye of Oriel, who turned the chair as he proceeded, and who seemed to take great interest in the investigation.

"What is in those drawers yonder, Miss?" asked Sergeant Slipper, pointing to a set of drawers in a cupboard.

"The dead man might tell you if he could speak," was the reply. "I never looked into them."

"Do you know anything about the will?"

"That, I believe, can be found at the Security Deposit Company, where he had several boxes."

The search soon ended and Sergeant Slipper announced to Oriel that they were ready to go below.

"One thing I would like to know, Miss," remarked the rotund policeman. "And it is important, seeing what has occurred to-night. How did you get into this room?"

A smile illumined Oriel's face and she seemed to enjoy the officer's quandary.

"There was no keyhole to the iron door, Miss. We had to break it down to get to you. Is there a secret stairway to this house?"

"I know of none."

"You don't mean to tell us that you came up by the main stairs and got into this room by the door yonder?"

"Why not, Mr. Officer?"

"I can't see how it could be done. What say you, Mr. Blue?"

Bastien shook his head, but, as he caught Oriel's glance, he seemed to shiver.

"You want to keep the manner of your entrance here a secret, Miss, I see that. But you must know it cannot remain a secret very long. It is the duty of my friend, Mr. Keene, here, to make all things clear, and he will reach the end of this mystery in spite of all attempts to keep it dark. That is his business. He is to take charge of this case, and you will see him at the end of the trail, no matter what be your cherished secrets now."

Oriel made no reply, but looked at the detective for a moment, and then glanced toward the hall.

"We will go down, now," added the officer, and he led the way downstairs and opened the door of the death room.

Keene, at the policeman's side as the latter turned the knob, had this order whispered in his ear:

"Watch her, Keene. She is keeping something back. See that she betrays no emotion without being seen. I'll spring the other trap on her before we quit the room."

The Clew Hawk stepped aside to let Oriel precede him, and Bastien and Royal Flush followed in after her.

A dead silence followed the entrance of the little group, and Sergeant Slipper took a position from which he could watch Oriel's every expression and movement.

The young girl stopped near the table and her gaze fell at once to the stiffening figure on the carpet.

Her form seemed to straighten, and her face, pale at all times, appeared to quiver slightly.

Her hands were shut along her sides and partially concealed by the folds of her black gown, and altogether she looked calm, but terribly interested.

"Did you find him dead when you came here?" suddenly asked Sergeant Slipper.

Oriel raised her eyes to him and looked him fairly in the face.

Her lips did not part, and in another moment her eyes wandered back to the ghastly object on the floor.

"You will perceive that there is blood on one of the palms," continued Slipper, with all the heartlessness of an old time inquisitor. "Measure your words, Miss, for there are witnesses here who may repeat them. There is blood in the right palm, and upon the floor near the same hand were found minute pieces of glass like the fragments of a glass sphere."

Oriel went forward and bent over the body.

She was watched by every one in the chamber, and the silence that came down upon this scene was almost palpable.

She lifted the stained hand and bent still closer.

She turned so as to let the light fall upon it and for half a second her gaze became riveted upon it.

The stain was still there, but not so plain as it had been.

"That is not blood," said she, looking up, and then her lips met firmly.

"Not blood?" cried Sergeant Slipper. "When we saw it first it was running, and—"

"You must have been mistaken. This is not blood."

"But, look at the wall yonder. Don't you see a mark there as if he staggered thither after being struck and tried to support himself from falling?"

Oriel rose and looked searchingly at the spot designated by the fat forefinger of Sergeant Slipper.

"What do you call this?"

"Blood, perhaps. I am not prepared to say what it is, but I am sure that the stain in the hand yonder was not blood."

Slipper and Keene exchanged looks and the policeman winked.

"Secrecy, if you know anything, can do you no good," now added Bastien. "Murder has been done and the murderer must be brought to light. You seem to be able to furnish a clew, but you will not. Don't you know, Oriel, that your silence will subject you to harsh criticism, and that it may retard the cause of justice to the final failure of right?"

"I know all this," was the quick answer, and Oriel Orne was facing Bastien, who had fallen back alongside of Royal Flush. "I have a right to keep back what I know about this crime, even saying that I know anything at all about it. There are others who know more than I do. There are those who expect to profit by this tragedy, but we shall see whether they profit or not."

"She's a mystery," thought the sergeant. "She deserves a good deal of attention by Keene, and if she didn't kill him herself, she evidently has an idea who did."

The policeman looked at the detective and continued, but aloud:

"We can do nothing more here, just now. This matter has passed into the hands of the police. But I would like to see Miss Orne alone for a moment."

Bastien and Royal Flush exchanged looks, but did not object, and stepped out into the hall, followed by Kimball Keene.

The sergeant shut the door and turned upon Oriel, who stood at the table, one of her white hands resting upon the edge.

"What do you know about this bit of paper, Miss?" asked the policeman, stepping up to her and taking from his waistcoat a piece of crumpled paper, which he opened.

Oriel started as she seemed to recognize it, but reached out and took it from his hand.

She read silently:

"Men die suddenly nowadays. You are in the shadow. Beware!"

"ORIEL."

Slipper watched her and said, abruptly:

"Roundsmen Clipper found it in the dead man's pocket. Did you write it, Miss?"

"I wrote it," answered Oriel, handing the paper back.

"Threat or warning?"

The girl appeared to gasp for air; her body reeled, and the next moment Sergeant Slipper had caught her in his arms and was calling for Kimball Keene.

"Here, Keene," said he, as the Metropolitan ferret appeared. "You will take the young lady home in our cab. This is an easy case."

CHAPTER IV.

ORIEL'S STORY.

The dead man's protegee offered no remonstrance, and Keene escorted her to the cab in which he and Sergeant Slipper had come to the scene of the tragedy, and in a little while they were on their way to Fourteenth street.

Oriel seemed busy with her thoughts, while the detective waited for her to speak and wondered if she would let a ray of light in upon the murder.

Every now and then he caught a glimpse of Oriel's face, and saw that it was still white and tensely drawn.

Her hands he could not see; she kept them buried in the folds of her dress, and whenever he looked at her it seemed that she shuddered and turned her eyes away.

Was this young girl guilty? Was she the murderess—the woman whom Roundsmen Clipper had seen come out of the reclus's house a short time before his discovery?

There was the bit of paper which he had taken from the dead man's pocket—the one which had caused Oriel to reel

from Sergeant Slipper with a gasp of horror, but not until after she had confessed to its authorship.

The young girl was fighting a mental battle; she was at war with herself, as the detective guessed from what he could see of her, and at last he gave up all hopes of drawing her out.

Suddenly Oriel leaned toward Keene and said, her voice sounding strangely, mingled as it was with the rattling of the vehicle:

"Do you think me guilty?"

The question came so suddenly that Kimball started.

"The other one does—I am sure of that," she went on. "Your friend thinks that the blood of Raymond Rolfe is on these hands," and she thrust them forward till they almost touched the man. "Do you?"

"I never express an opinion of that importance until I have positive proof."

"Or circumstantial," she smiled. "You know, as you certainly must, for you are a runner down of crimes, that circumstantial proof is often as good as direct."

"Sometimes better, Miss Orne," answered Keene. "It has oftentimes proved fatal to the defendant."

"So it has. I was in the room with the iron door when you broke it in. That is bad for me, isn't it?"

"You may be able to clear all that up by your story."

"But it would be hard to convince your friend of the police. He thinks I killed Raymond Rolfe."

"I never asked Mr. Slipper for his opinion," evasively replied the detective.

"No? Well, I am sure it would not be very complimentary toward me. He showed me the paper which the roundsman found in the pocket of the deceased, and I was overcome."

"But you told him, Miss Orne, that you wrote it."

"That is true. I wrote that note—I sent it to him yesterday, for it is past one now and consequently another day. I don't blame Mr. Slipper for what he thinks, for circumstances are against me. You are listening to me, Mr. Keene."

"I am listening, Miss Orne."

Once more she leaned back in the cab and for half a second shut her eyes. Her hands came out from under her gown and she crossed them in her lap.

"Please tell the driver to drive a little slower. We are near home, and I want to talk a little."

Keene acceded to the request with much eagerness, and, settling back in his corner once more, waited for Oriel to proceed.

"You must know that I am, or was, Raymond Rolfe's protegee, and that I now live in a house furnished by him, with one servant—a maid named Floralia."

"I believe I am the child of a friend of his, a gentleman who, at great personal sacrifice, did him a favor which he never forgot. At that time Raymond Rolfe was not the wealthy man he was at the hour of his death. Subsequently, and from what he learned from my father, he laid the foundation of his enormous fortune, which must encroach close on to a million at the present time."

"In Fourteenth street I have lived for ten years, for I was twelve when I became his ward, or protegee, which is, perhaps, the better name. I went to see him whenever I cared to. He gave me the keys to the house, and I had the entree at all hours. I took good care, however, not to inquire into his work in the laboratory, knowing that he had secrets, and among them some which he would not have surrendered to save his life."

"There ought to be in his private boxes at the Safe Deposit Company in Wall street a will giving me the bulk of his property, with a living for his half-brother, Bastien Blue."

Oriel seemed to speak the name with aversion.

"Raymond Rolfe has been the victim of a conspiracy, but after what I said and did under the eyes of your police friend, I would not be believed in this statement. But it is true. A year ago he fell into the hands of as cunning a man as

ever lived, and to-day he rejoices over the tragedy!"

"He may not have heard of it, miss."

"My word for it that Doctor Doom knows that Raymond Rolfe inhabits his house ready for the coroner and the grave! You have never met the doctor and his daughter, Della?"

"They inhabit a splendid mansion on H— street, a house which is fitted up with all the style of a ducal palace, yet where did this man—I should call him demon—get his wealth? Ask his dupes. Ask the victims he has had on his list, and ask them where they would be to-day but for the greed of this pair—this demon doctor and his equally demon daughter."

"Doctor Doom came often to Raymond Rolfe's house, but never, to my knowledge, was he admitted to the laboratory, though he professed to be interested in science, and threw out broad hints that he would like to look beyond the iron door. The man is a fascinator—I mean a fascinator as the serpent fascinates its victim. Whenever he left Raymond Rolfe's house my guardian would have to take a rest, and he invariably fell into a long, deep slumber, out of which he would come without the slightest recollection of the doctor's visit."

"Such a man is Doctor Doom, with whom Bastien Blue is on familiar terms, and Bastien Blue is as potter's clay in the hands of the demon doctor and his daughter."

"Now, as to to-night, Mr. Keene."

Oriel took a long breath and seemed to hesitate.

"It was eleven o'clock when I reached the house for the purpose of seeing if he had acted upon my note which, as you know, was found in his pocket. The door was unlocked. I must have missed the policeman whose beat runs past the house, for I did not see him. I entered the house and saw the door leading into the room where he was found ajar."

"I found him in the same position in which he was seen by you when you came. Death had taken place some time before. I raised no alarm, but for some time I stood unnerved in the presence of death, and was not capable of making a noise."

"When my thoughts came back, and strength returned, I searched the room for what I could find tending to throw light upon the deed, but I was not rewarded. That is," she added, "not very well."

"You found something, Miss Orne?"

One of Oriel's hands lost itself in the pocket of her dress.

"For some time, as I happened to know, having made the discovery by a secret visit to the laboratory three weeks ago, he had been experimenting on a certain poison, which he blew into little glass spheres, sealing them over the spirit lamp. You saw the bits of glass on the floor about his dead hand to-night."

The detective nodded.

"I found on the floor, not broken, and under the table where it had rolled, one of these spheres, charged with a deadly poison which will take human life almost in the twinkling of an eye."

Oriel drew from her pocket as she concluded, a handkerchief, which she opened, displaying something that glittered in the light of a street lamp.

"If you hold it up between you and the next light you will see that it contains a fluid as red as blood, and that is what deceived all of you to-night," she went on. "But, as I have said, the mark on the wall is real blood. This little sphere, unbroken, must have fallen from the hands or the pocket of his slayer."

"Why not from his own, miss?"

"To believe that would be to confess that Raymond Rolfe committed suicide. But he was murdered!"

The young detective did not reply, but waited for Oriel to proceed.

"When I had searched the room I went up to the laboratory. I never became his confidant so far as to be given the secret of the iron door by him. I discovered that accidentally. I went up to the chamber of science, I say, and by the door which Royal Flush's hammer demolished."

"I found nearly everything as I had seen them during my last visit. He had been there in the earlier hours of the night, for I could see that the retorts had been used, and the phial which held the glass globes stood in the little cupboard with the green glass. I opened that cupboard and took out the phial. I held it up to the light, and counted them as I had done on my last visit. Two were missing, or, at least, the phial did not contain as many by that number. There is nothing in this you might say, for he was apt to remove them himself; but, let me prove that he had not done so."

"Pasted on the bottom of the bottle was a paper dated that very day—yesterday, you remember—stating that just so many glass spheres containing the secret poison were in the phial. Not only this, but the phial was sealed with green wax, showing that it did contain so many spheres at the time of the making of the memoranda. When I looked at it, after my discovery of his body in the room below and in the light of the laboratory's electric lamp, two were missing—"

"And the green seal, miss?"

"Apparently it was not disturbed."

For a moment a strange silence fell between the detective and Oriel Orne. They looked at one another, Kimball Keene's face full of interest and mystery, and the young girl's almost triumphant.

"What does all this prove to you, Miss Orne?" Kimball asked.

"Perhaps I should have asked this question of you," she responded, with a smile. "I am the narrator, you the listener. You reverse the order of things a little; but, never mind. What do I think? Simply this: The secret of the opening of the iron door was known to some one else. That person knew where the phial was, but did not know about the memoranda on the bottom. That person knew about the deadly spheres—knew that one placed in a human palm could be broken by the closing of that hand, and thus destroy a life."

"The glass would cut through the skin and the deadly agent get at once into the blood, stilling the heart almost as quickly as the dropping of an eyelash. I say the person who killed Raymond Rolfe knew this."

"But you warned him. He got the warning. It was found on his person. Against whom did you warn him, miss? Who was the 'shadow'?"

The girl looked away, and the detective saw her flesh jerk.

"You would not warn him unless you knew something that threatened him?" urged Keene.

"Why should I?"

She spoke without looking toward him.

"Roundsman Clipper saw a woman come out of the house last night."

"Does he say so?" cried Oriel, turning upon Keene. "Did he see no man come out? Is he sure it was a woman? Did he tell you?"

"No; but—"

"We are at my home, Mr. Keene. You have heard all I have to say—at this time."

That was all, and the next moment the cab stopped in front of the girl's home.

CHAPTER V.

DEVILISH MAGIC.

About an hour after quitting the house of the tragedy, Bastien Blue mounted a flight of stone steps in front of an elegant mansion in another part of the city and rather nervously jerked the bell.

It was the morning of a new day, a day which was to give New York another mystery of crime and to open a series of thrilling events, to be chronicled in these pages.

On the street no one seemed to be astir, and the policeman, half asleep in a convenient doorway not far off, was not disturbed by the young man's ring.

The house, a three-story one, looked dark enough, but the bell had not ceased its alarm in the hall, when a light was seen.

Footsteps came toward the door, and, in Bastien Blue, with a gasp, came back to the material world, and looked around quickly to see if Della was near.

another second, it opened, and Bastien Blue stepped inside, to be confronted by a man in a dark dressing gown, with the odor of tobacco smoke clinging to it.

He was older than the visitor; he might have been fifty, with whiskers on his face, with deep-set, keen eyes, and a high forehead, not unlike in contour the man who lay mysteriously dead in another street.

He greeted Bastien with close familiarity, and led the way to a large parlor alongside the hall.

The room was elegantly appointed, and the costly paintings, the scattered bric-a-brac, and the beautiful papering told that it was the abode of wealth.

"You are an early bird," said Bastien's friend, drawing off to a chair in which he seated himself, at the same time taking up a cigar from a lot on the table near at hand. "I have been up experimenting a little, but if you had remained away another ten minutes you would have found me abed."

Bastien was full of what he had just seen, and he felt that he was listening to a man who had heard nothing of the murder.

"I have been detained, and but for that detention," said he, "I might not have called at all."

"Oh, you've been up to the Lodge, eh? I understand you've been there shooting for a few days. What luck?"

"I came down yesterday. Luck was bad enough. But you haven't heard, of course?"

"I haven't been out of the house for a day," was the reply. "Consequently, all the news I get is what I have been able to glean between hours, in the newspapers. You look like a person who has news of note."

"I have. I have just come from Raymond's. He is dead."

There came to the face of the listener a look, puzzling in its intensity, as he took the cigar from his mouth and leaned toward Bastien.

"Dead? You don't tell me this?"

"It is true. I have just come from the place, which is already in the hands of the police."

"What! in their hands? The house of my old friend, Rolfe? What caused them to come upon the scene?"

"The dark and mysterious circumstances that surround the death," answered Bastien. "Raymond was found in the little room on the first floor, dead, with a stain in his palm, and a splotch of blood on the wall."

"Who found him thus?"

"The policeman on the beat—Roundsmen Clipper, the little man. You recall him."

"So I do," and the host looked over the gold-rimmed glasses which bestrode his nose and took a long breath.

"This is pretty hard to believe," said he. "Raymond Rolfe dead? Killed, they think, eh?"

"They think so."

"What do you think?"

"It looks dark, that's a fact. I went to the house with Royal because of a presentiment which I could not shake off; but the policeman had been there before me, and in a little while a sergeant and a detective came."

"What, already? Seems to me they caught onto the tragedy in a hurry."

"The hurry seems purely accidental. But for the policeman seeing a woman come out of the house the murder might have remained undiscovered."

"He saw that, did he? Clipper?"

"Yes. He next went to the door and found it unlocked; then he proceeded to investigate, and discovered Raymond on the floor, alone and dead."

"The only person in the house, too, I suppose?"

"I guess Clipper thought so, at any rate; but subsequent investigation brought about a thrilling discovery which tingles my nerves yet."

"What was that?"

"I'll have to begin at the beginning," answered Bastien, who saw that he would have to tell the story of his adventures.

and the finding of Oriel in the room of the iron door.

He began at once, and narrated the whole story, listened to most attentively by the man in the dressing gown.

He was winding up, when the door leading into the hall opened, and a young woman entered.

Her figure and carriage were magnificent.

Her age might have been two and twenty, and her face, rounded out and voluptuously fair, was lighted by a pair of piercing eyes which from the first transfixed Bastien in a fascinating manner.

This woman was Della Doom, the doctor's daughter. She came forward with a smile, saying that she had been disturbed by voices in the parlor, and had come down to see what they meant.

"Our friend has just told a terrible story," explained Doctor Doom, looking from Bastien to Della. "He is the bearer of bad tidings, which must affect his future in an unknown manner. Raymond Rolfe is dead. He has been found murdered in his house on H— street, the three-story one, dear, which I pointed out to you the other day."

"Murdered?" and Della's face seemed to lose color as she came toward the table, where she stopped, resting upon the edge of the cloth a jeweled hand. "You don't mean to tell us, Bastien, that a tragedy has occurred in that house?"

Bastien said that one had taken place; and looking again at the doctor, who nodded, he finished his narrative.

"You did not hear the whole of the story, child," said Doctor Doom. "Oriel was found in the laboratory after the iron door had been broken down."

"Oriel, his protegee?"

"Yes," replied Bastien. "We found her standing in the middle of the chamber."

"Frightened?"

"She was white, but she ordered us to proceed cautiously, saying that since Raymond's death, the house and all it contained belonged to her."

"Was she right, Bastien?"

"I do not know."

"There was a will."

"Oh, yes; but I know nothing of its contents."

"She must have known," assumed Doctor Doom, relighting his cigar. "He told me once that he intended to provide for her, but I did not get to read the will which I witnessed."

"Oh, you witnessed a will, then?"

"Yes; it was three months ago. I was at the house, and he called my attention to a document which he said was his will. It looked regular, and I witnessed his signature then and there."

"There should have been another witness."

"There was one handy. He was having a little work done in the hall at the time, and the carpenter was called in to add his name to mine."

"Well," said Bastien, "I trust he has provided for Oriel. The girl has been under his care a long time."

"More than ten years."

"But how came she in the house—in the laboratory?" queried Della Doom.

"She did not give us any reason. She said that she was not there when the murder took place; but beyond that she would not go."

"Did they arrest her?"

"Bless you, no! The policeman said he had no right to do that, for there was, as yet, no proof at all that she was concerned in the killing. She fainted in the room below, after we had gone down from the laboratory, and the detective took her home in the cab which had brought him and the sergeant to the house."

"The detective?" echoed Della Doom, looking at her father, a quick, eager look.

"What is this man's name?"

"Kimball Keene."

"Is he a good one?"

"Said to be one of the best ferrets in New York, and we have some good ones here. He is young, but seems to know just what he wants. I took kindly to

him, believing that the matter has been placed in the right hands, and I am satisfied."

Bastien's voice seemed to falter as he neared the end of the last sentence, and, in another minute, his head fell forward on his bosom and he was asleep!

He had struggled against the strange look which Doctor Doom had riveted upon him; he had shivered underneath the cold glitter of the steel-gray eyes; and, as Dallas Doom gave his daughter a triumphant glance, the stately girl came round the table and bent over the young man.

She passed her hand before his face, but did not touch it. She next lifted one of his hands, but immediately let it fall again into his lap.

"It is a perfect condition," said she, looking at the doctor. "You never did it better."

Doctor Doom laid his cigar away, leaned toward the man in the chair, opened his coat, and thrust one hand into his pocket; but nothing seemed to reward him.

"Try the other pockets."

The long white hand of Doctor Doom did so; but he was forced to admit that the young man was not a good subject when it came to being a human storehouse.

"Now for the writing!" cried Della, crossing the room. "It must not be put off any longer. The game might escape us."

She opened a little cabinet in the wall and took out some paper, which she carried back to the table.

"Draw him up closer," she ordered. "You know what to make him write. Now!"

Bastien Blue's chair had been pulled closer to the table, and the paper spread before him.

His eyes, half open, did not seem to see anything, and his head had to be held up by the white hands of Della Doom.

"Make it binding!" she exclaimed, as a pen was placed in the young man's hand. "Make no mistake, for much depends on what we do to-night. This is our harvest time. The seed time is past."

Doctor Doom had brought his chair alongside the one occupied by the hypnotist's victim.

He seemed to take a long breath.

"You are ready to write, are you?" he asked.

A tremor passed over Bastien's frame. He tried to raise his head so as to nod affirmatively, and the hand gripped the pen tenaciously.

For the next three minutes the superior mind of the demon doctor controlled the movements of the hand on the table. Della looked over Bastien's shoulder and held her breath, while her dark eyes glistened.

"That is it!" she suddenly cried, snatching from the table the paper, upon which the ink was still wet. "This arms us! This is the triumph for which I have waited. This paper seals his soul to us, and henceforth Bastien Blue belongs to Della Doom."

The listener looked up and smiled. His was a face devilish in its outlines and demonish in every lineament and expression. It seemed to grow dark for a moment, then it assumed a deathly pallor while he glanced from his handsome daughter to the helpless man in the chair.

"Take possession of that paper," he ordered.

"Won't I? I need no command of that kind. All the powers that be could not wrest it from me, for it is worth its weight in diamonds, and I will show them how it fixes us when the time comes. You can bring him out of the trance at your leisure. Good-night, or, rather, good-morning!" And with that she vanished, and Doctor Doom and his victim were alone.

The doctor fell back in his chair and for a little while studied the man before him. It was like a tiger watching a lamb marked for a victim; but at last he put out his hand and drew the soft fingers gently over Bastien's face.

There was a quivering of the nerves; the head lifted of its own accord, and the eyes slowly opened.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FEMALE DETECTIVE.

Long before the news of the tragedy on H— street could reach the newspapers and furnish food for thought and speculation, it was in the hands of the police.

Sergeant Slipper had made his report, and the home of Raymond Rolfe was locked to the public, and was open to no one but the men of the law and the friends of justice.

These included several detectives, who came to the house as soon as news of the murder got abroad, but the matter had been confided to Kimball Keene by the superintendent, and the young detective was already at work.

The coroner was stumped at the inquest, for nothing but the stain in Raymond Rolfe's hand and a few slight cuts through the skin rewarded him for his pains.

At first this astute official was inclined to laugh at the theory of murder, and was ready to affirm that heart disease or some kindred malady had helped the strange man over the border line of life; but the testimony of both Roundsman Clipper and Sergeant Slipper came between him and that idea, and he was compelled to officially state that the recluse came to his death at the hands of parties unknown, and by some singular but terrible power which seemed to lie in the stain in the hand.

While the coroner was holding his inquest in the room where the body lay, Kimball Keene, having seen Oriel Orne home, had turned back from the house on Fourteenth street and was in a distant part of the city.

The morning was well advanced, and the sun was gilding with autumnal beauty the spires of several churches in the immediate vicinity.

On a very quiet street, so quiet that if the ferret had stopped at the corner which he turned, he would not have seen a vehicle nor heard the rattle of a wheel.

The houses were well-to-do dwellings, now and then fronted by shade trees. All were two-story buildings, showing that their occupants were people in moderate circumstances.

At the door of one of these houses, in the middle of a row, Kimball Keene stopped and rang. He was immediately admitted, and a little girl led him into a room, where she told him to wait till "Sarah" came down.

The detective seated himself in an arm-chair and waited. He had been there before, for he smiled at the pictures on the walls, and reached forward and took up several cards from a little basket on the table.

He did not have to wait long, for the door opened to admit a remarkable looking woman.

She was not over thirty, but her face was sharp and hawk-like, her cheek bones prominent, and her eyes restless and piercing.

Her jet-black hair was combed back from her face, and seemed glued to her skin; her hands were dark and unusually long, and from her glance came penetration and much searching power.

She stopped the moment she saw the detective, and then came on smiling.

"I was thinking of you this very morning," said she, in a deep voice. "You haven't been here since we played with the little Frenchman."

"Not since then, Sarah. You caged him brilliantly, but you should have shown a little mercy."

"Why? He didn't show any toward the poor old Jew whom he ground into the dust and then fleeced, with all the heartlessness of a lion. I like to trap such villains. You haven't such a matter for me this time, have you?"

"I have something better and something deeper."

"There was nothing very deep in the case of the Jew and the Frenchman," smiled the woman, who had pulled a chair up to the table and taken it, facing Kimball Keene. "In that case it was a matter of holding out; that was all. If the

Frenchman had not broken down I don't know what we would have done."

"Oh," laughed Kimball, "you had him where he had to break down. I never saw anything like it."

"Perhaps not. But, what is this new affair?"

Kimball Keene looked at her again and seemed to collect his thoughts.

"It is a murder," he said at last.

"Well, that's a little out of the way. It promises something lively, at least. And it is a mysterious murder, or you would not have come here to tell me about it."

"It is somewhat out of the ordinary."

"Like the Powell case was?"

"It is better than that. You got to the end of that clew in short meter—"

"That was largely guesswork, but we happened to guess right," she went on.

"This time I hope we won't have to guess, but will have to reason the matter out, and pick up link by link. That is the way to get at a mystery. Link by link! You remember that case of the Silver Mouth-piece? Well—but here I am getting you away from the morsel you have brought me. Not another word from me until you're through with the story. Now, proceed, Kimball."

The detective crossed his legs and leaned back in the chair.

She was waiting with a good deal of impatience, and her eyes seemed to have lost some of their fire, and were filled with a softer light.

Kimball Keene told the story of the tragedy of Raymond Rolfe's retreat as he knew it. He began at the beginning, which was Roundsman Clipper's experience; told how he and Sergeant Slipper had visited the premises to find Bastien Blue and Royal Flush on the front steps; how they had searched the house, to find the strange mark in the dead man's palm, the splotch of crimson on the wall, the breaking down of the iron door, the discovery of Oriel Orne, her fainting spell, and his talk with her in the cab on the way home.

True to her promise, the woman who listened to this narrative did not interrupt him.

She was Sarah Sharp, Detective Keene's right bower.

Not very many knew what she was; fewer still knew that the little child who had let Keene into the house was the custodian of secrets which might have startled thousands if her little tongue could have been induced to disclose them.

Sarah Sharp was a female ferret.

Kimball Keene knew; the Superintendent of Police knew, and one or two others shared the secret of the woman's calling.

Beyond this little circle, Sarah Sharp, living quietly in the quiet street, was not taken for what she was; no one suspected that the plain-faced woman who came and went at odd intervals, and had no visitors, was one of the keenest clew-hawks in the city, and was to be dreaded by the evil-doer more than the famous Javarts and the shrewdest of Vidocqs.

"It's a pity for the girl. And so young," were the first words that fell from the woman's lips after the detective's narrative.

"I pitied her from the depths of my soul. She will be drawn into this dark affair. There is no help for it. The newspapers will take up the story of the iron door and her discovery in the laboratory while Raymond Rolfe lay dead—murdered—on the lower floor. They will want to know how she came to discover the secret of that door, and what she was doing in the chamber at the time."

"It looks black for her, you must admit that, Kimball."

"Of course. Sergeant Slipper calls it 'an easy case.'"

"It is a deep, a dark one. It is a case that will call forth all our powers. The hand that killed Raymond Rolfe knew what it was doing. A man who thinks no deeper than Slipper—I knew the man before he got upon the force—would naturally call it an easy case, especially after the admission Oriel made to him. You did not enter her house?"

"I went no further than the door."

"Therefore, you did not see what sort of servant she has—Floralia, I believe you called her."

"Floralia."

"Well, that will be something for me. Roundsman Clipper ought to be able to describe the woman who came out of the house just before he went in."

"I will see him this morning."

"Let me do that," urged Sarah Sharp, looking at the detective. "There will be other work for you to do—for instance, the looking up of the will. If you can, find out what it contains. The girl is confident, isn't she?"

"She told me so this morning. Raymond Rolfe had no near heir, if you except the half-brother, Bastien Blue. He told Oriel, so she asserts, that the bulk of his wealth was hers. He got it through her father."

"Find out more about her father. Discover—perhaps certain papers to be found in the house will tell about him—who he was, and why Rolfe was so deeply indebted to him. And those bogus Brazilian bonds which gave the police so much trouble, you recollect? It was suspected at the time that Rolfe had to do with them, but I believe we had to exonerate him. We got pretty close to one Dr. Doom that time, you remember. We had the suave doctor on the gridiron of uneasiness."

"So we had. I haven't seen him since."

"I saw the girl in the Park last week. She has grown taller, it seems, and her face is really magnificent. She was pretty then, and the night of the denouement—the night she turned upon you in the lobby of the theater and gave you that look—she was imperious. Della Doom! I won't forget you, either."

A smile for a moment seemed to chase from Sarah Sharp's face its coldness, and her hand made a note of something with a pencil on a tablet on the table.

"Go back in your story a little ways," she said. "I want to hear again how Bastien acted through it all. And his shadow, this man called Royal Flush? His right bower in all things, and ready to do his master's bidding at all times, day or night. He was with him, of course. They were at the scene when you came. Of course! He told you, did he, that a presentiment had goaded him to the house of crime? Do you believe in such things?"

"I have had something akin to presentiments."

"In a way. That is, we feel that something is going to happen or has happened? That's it, isn't it, Kimball?"

The young man nodded and smiled.

"I wonder if Bastien ever had any presentiments before?" Sarah Sharp went on, a little sarcastically. "This one came at the right time; couldn't have been more opportune. Perhaps both men got the same presentiment at the same moment! Why shouldn't they?"

The detective made no reply, but watched the fingers that moved nervously across the tablet, and when they stopped he expected the woman to speak.

"Bastien took things coolly, didn't he?"

"He was calm until we found Oriel in the laboratory. Then he showed some emotion."

"And looked at Royal Flush?"

"I saw a look pass between the two men."

"Was Mr. Flush surprised?"

"As much as his master."

"Wonderful nerves that young Ajax has," remarked Sarah Sharp. "They say he is the wonder of the gymnasium; no wonder he broke down that door. You don't know Mr. Flush. Born in Cuba; drifted from the island; entered the English navy; fought a battle with the Boers, got a spear wound in the left wrist, and finally came to America to seek his fortune, and to find it by serving Bastien Blue."

Kimball Keene looked astonished.

"I did not know that you had read the biography of this young man," he exclaimed.

"No more than I have read that of

others," was the reply. "I happen to know a little something about Mr. Flush. Nice young man, with the strength of a giant in his limbs and the faithfulness of a dog in his nature. We'll get better acquainted within the next few days, perhaps. But now, let me call in Sparrow. You want to kiss Sparrow, of course."

Sarah Sharp called aloud the name she had just spoken, and the child who had admitted the detective ran into the room.

"That is Kimball—Uncle Kimball," said Sarah. "Run and kiss him, child."

With a cry of delight the little one ran up to the detective, and mounting into his lap, stood on his knees and threw her arms around his neck.

"She's growing, don't you think?" asked the female ferret, looking at the child with an admiring glance. "Looks more every day like Lucy. There, that will do, little one. You can go now."

Sparrow climbed down, and running to the door, halted there to throw the ferret a kiss, after which she vanished.

"Not for the world would I have Sparrow know that I am going into this crimson case," Sarah spoke. "She knows enough now. She has more secrets than a child of her age is entitled to know. But they will be secrets with her as long as she lives. Now, Kimball. We are in for the fight, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"I enter this battle with my old-time vigor. I am going to see the end of the trail. Who killed Raymond Rolfe? I will answer that before long, or I will help you answer it. It shall be my last case. Thereafter I live for Sparrow. I will begin at once. I will look into several little matters and some one will soon know that Sarah Sharp, the silent ferret, is on the trail once more!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEATEN CLEW-HAWK.

Kimball Keene was not the only ferret who was drawn to the scene of the strange and mysterious murder.

Others came to the place and looked the house over, saw the broken door and the splotch on the wall; but the body of the victim had been removed and Oriel was not there to mystify them.

The detective, after leaving Sarah Sharp's house, went back to his own—not far off the great thoroughfare, Broadway.

He let the day wane without venturing out on the trail, remaining indoors with his thoughts and theories.

What Sarah Sharp was doing he did not know, nor did he concern himself much about her.

That she had left little Sparrow alone he did not doubt, but the child was used to having the whole house to herself, and was able to perform its duties like a little lady.

With the approach of another night Keene prepared for his visit to the Rolfe house, which was to be a secret one—so secret, in fact, that Roundsman Clipper was not to be told to watch the house while the man of many trails was inside.

There was one thing about Oriel's narrative which doubly interested Kimball—the story of the sealed phial, the one which contained the glass globules with the deadly poison inside, one of which she said she had found on the floor near the dead man's hand.

Was the phial still in the cupboard in the laboratory? Had it remained on the shelf, sealed still, with the green seal which Oriel had asserted did not seem to have been tampered with?

Kimball Keene proceeded to the house with a key which would admit him. It was not hard for him to avoid the roundsman, and in a little while he passed the threshold, and once more he stood in the room of the tragedy.

It was silent and full of shadows.

The detective did not turn on the gas for a little while, but took a chair and let the silence deepen, as it were.

He heard the wheels that went up and down the street, and now and then he caught the sounds of feet as they hur-

ried past, the crime seeming to have lent speed to the pedestrians who were compelled to pass the house.

By and by Kimball went out into the hall and mounted the steps, but when halfway up something stopped him and he looked down.

It sounded to him like the opening of a door; yet, though he listened intently, he heard no more.

The broken door had been lifted from its fastenings and some one had placed it against the wall, leaving the way to the laboratory unobstructed.

The detective made his way into the chamber and struck a match.

He was strong enough to lift the iron door back to its place and shut it, keeping it shut by placing some furniture against it.

Then he went to work.

There was the cupboard, with the door of dark green glass, and, as some one had left it unlocked, he opened it noiselessly. The light falling into the little cabinet showed him the narrow shelves with their contents—small phials of all colors, some half full of liquids and others nearly empty.

The keen eyes of the detective wandered round in search of a particular phial intelligently described by Oriel, and at last he found it stuck away in one corner, as if trying to hide itself.

Seizing it, Kimball went over to the light with it in his hand. The seal was to all appearances intact; it had been well sealed, and upon the green was the impression of a seal ring like the one he had seen on Rolfe's hand.

When he held the phial up to the light he could count the little globules it contained. The number coincided exactly with what Oriel had told him.

Then he looked at the memoranda on the bottom of the phial and noticed the fatal discrepancy.

Was it possible that Raymond Rolfe, the poison maker, had miscounted the globules in the phial? That, after all, he had made a mistake of that kind?

He counted them again and again; he looked at the green seal and the impression of the seal ring became plainer each time.

He was looking at the memoranda for the fourth time when he heard a door open and shut.

Still holding the phial, he turned and went over to the disconnected door.

All was still now, and, reaching out, he lowered the gas until the laboratory was wrapped in darkness, save the spark which told where he would find the regulator when he wanted it.

In vain did he listen for a sound.

The house had grown as silent as if the dead lay in that chamber and not in another room in another part of the city, awaiting transition to the tomb.

Several minutes passed and Kimball Keene still remained a statue in that room with his face near the door and his every sense on the alert.

He at last turned toward the gas jet and reached out and seized the regulator.

In another instant his hand would have turned on a little flood of light; but at that moment he heard a repetition of the sound—the shutting of a door below; then, dropping the phial upon the table near the dead man's work-bench, the detective stepped into the corridor beyond the door.

No one could see him. The darkness out there was dense and the walls, dark themselves, still further screened him.

He advanced to the banister and leaned over.

The steps were before him, and below them was the little space which lay between them and the several doors there.

At first he saw or heard nothing.

The old house was as still as before, and he waited for a repetition of the strange sound.

At last it came, and to his astonishment the door of the dead room opened and in the faint light which came from it a person stepped into the hall.

Keene shrank back, but did not relinquish altogether his position at the banister.

His eyes were upon the person standing ghost-like in the hall below, and he was watching the nocturnal prowler with the keenest interest.

The ferret found himself looking down upon a female figure.

Who was it?

Had Sarah Sharp herself come to the scene of the crime?

Not at all unlikely, for she had taken the trail with her old-time ardor, and more than once had beaten him to the goal.

But the figure was not quite tall enough for Sarah Sharp's. It was well knit, but there was something strange about it to the ferret's practiced eye, and he waited for it to move.

Perhaps it would come upstairs!

If it were Oriel she would be very likely to come up the steps, and he would not be surprised at the girl's visit, for there was much to fetch her back.

All at once the person watched went toward the front door and opened it.

It was not Oriel!

It was not Sarah Sharp!

The face was veiled, but the ferret believed that before a strong light he might be able to make out its contour, if not get a glimpse of the eyes hidden now by the veil.

The door was opened, but the person, who still held a gloved hand on the knob, did not go out.

She seemed to be taking a survey of the premises outside, for her body was pushed forward and she was looking up and down the quiet street—for Roundsman Clipper?

Kimball Keene saw that she was clad in close-fitting and plain black. The garments had been put on for quiet work, for there was nothing about them to attract attention, and the hands which he saw were long, and were encased in gloves of shiny blackness.

The door was shut again, for the detective heard some one on the pavement, and while the unknown woman drew back she threw a hasty look up the steps.

It might have been well for her future and against the ferret's final happiness if she had caught a glimpse of the motionless man at the top of the stairs.

It was not a long look which she sent up the steps, for she seemed satisfied that she was the only person in the house, and at this the detective smiled.

"She'll go now," thought Kimball Keene. "She will go out now and let me try a little tracking."

Once more the strange woman turned to the door, for the footsteps had passed and she would find the coast clear.

She drew back with a little cry as she looked out again, and, shutting the door, she turned the key which was on the inside, and retreated along the hall.

Some one was out there whom she did not care to see. Perhaps she had caught a glimpse of Roundsman Clipper on duty?

There was another door at the other end of the corridor, and now the veiled woman moved toward it.

Kimball Keene leaned further over the banisters in order to follow his quarry: he saw her reach the door and grip the knob suddenly.

There she stood again. Her veiled face was turned toward him, and he saw how well the features were concealed.

"Heavens! the light. I forgot that!" she exclaimed, and, in another moment, she came down the hall and bounded into the room where she had left burning the jet which had revealed her to the watching Clew Hawk.

It was put out in a jiffy, then all was dark.

The detective sprang down the carpeted steps and was midway when he heard a door.

It was the front one this time.

He seemed to reach it in an instant after it had been closed; his hand seized the knob, and as he wrenched it he pulled back, but the portal did not yield.

It was locked; and while he searched for the catch which held him for a moment from his victim he heard footsteps outside.

Like everything about the dead man's house, the catch was a peculiar one; but, when he had found it, he discovered that some one—some one connected with the murder—had escaped him!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL OF THE PHIAL.

Kimball Keene stopped a moment on the steps and looked for his quarry.

Clipper was not in sight, but, as Kimball left the steps, the policeman came into view.

The detective started forward and stopped him, but to his inquiries, Clipper stated that he had seen nothing.

"You see, I am on the lookout all the time, and especially since my terrible find in that house," said the policeman in an important whisper. "By the way, why not go back and see if we two can't find out a little something new?"

The ferret took kindly to the suggestion, and they re-entered the house.

"It was a woman I saw come out of the house the night of the murder," said Clipper. "I saw her on the step, where she stopped for a second."

"Ever seen Miss Orne come from the house after dark?" asked Keene, not appearing to notice the remark.

The roundsman reflected a moment.

"Not very often. She wasn't much of a night owl, that girl wasn't. I remember once I caught her maid coming from the house."

"Floralia?"

"I don't know what you call her. I know that she is a singular looking creature, who has eyes that appear to look you through and through, but through no apparent effort of her own. That was about two weeks ago. I happened in front of the house, when, all at once, I heard something fall in the hall out yonder, just like a human being, and I was about to investigate, when the door opened, and out stepped that woman."

"How came you to know her?"

"She came here with Miss Oriel one day last summer—followed her, I believe, for the young lady was displeased, and told the maid so on the steps. That's how I came to know that the woman who came out of the house after the noise was—Floralia, you called her."

"The woman who came out of the house after the murder couldn't have been Floralia, think you?"

"No; I would swear to that. Floralia has a tall figure, and the person I saw that night wasn't near so tall, though she was no pygmy."

"Dressed in black?"

"She appeared to be; but all dark clothes are black after night, you know."

They were in the room of the murder while Clipper talked, and Kimball had turned on the gas.

The policeman had taken an arm-chair and the detective leaned against the table.

"You looked the house over that night, didn't you, Mr. Clipper?"

"Not all over. I had to send in a report of the death, you know, and seeing that it was likely to become a case for you, I was eager to make the trail as hot as possible."

"Which was right," sanctioned Keene. "You looked in the dead man's pockets and found the bit of paper?"

"Yes."

"You saw the red marks on the palm, too?"

"I couldn't help seeing them, for the light fell right into the half-open hand."

"And that splotch yonder?"

The detective cast his eyes upon the darkish stain, or where it had been on the wall; but, the next moment he had sprung toward it and was looking at the spot in blank astonishment.

"What's the matter, Mr. Keene?" asked the roundsman.

"By Jove! it's not here now!"

Clipper came over to look at a spot covered by the detective's finger.

"You saw it, did you, Mr. Keene?"

"Yes! it was quite plain right after the finding of the body, and was plain to be seen this very night, for I was in this room before I went up-stairs to the laboratory."

"It's queer," said Clipper. "Do you think the woman in the house to-night, could have removed it?"

"Quite probable," was the reply. "She may have entered the house for that very purpose."

"But I don't see any signs of the removal. Hold! what's this, Mr. Keene?" and the finger of the policeman was touching a certain spot.

The paper looked a little blurred in that spot, but one had to stand in a certain position to see it. Exchanging places with his companion, Keene gazed at the blur a moment, and ran his soft finger over it to discover that the paper had been disturbed on the surface, as if some one had tried to remove the splotch.

"You see it, eh, Mr. Keene? Cleverly done, I say. Look how the stain has been removed. She knew something about chemicals, seems to me."

The detective made no reply, but looked at the blur, and saw that while it was to be seen only from a certain point, and by daylight would be entirely invisible, the blood stain had been obliterated.

"You weren't in the laboratory, Mr. Clipper?" he said, turning suddenly upon the roundsman. "Of course not, for the iron door was shut then. I was up there to-night; and, by the way, I left an important factor on the table," he said, reflectively.

"Oh, it's there yet, of course," replied the policeman. "I would like to take a look into the room with the iron door."

They left the room and went up the stairs together.

"How did Bastien, the half-brother, take it?" abruptly asked the roundsman.

"He was terribly shocked both by the death of Rolfe and the finding of Miss Orne in the laboratory."

"And that young giant, his shadow, the man who hammered the door in?"

"Nothing affects him, I guess. He was cool at all times, just as if a murder like this was an everyday occurrence with him."

"Maybe it is."

It was a singular comment, and caused the detective to look at Clipper and recall what Sarah Sharp had said about Royal Flush.

By this time they had reached the broken door, which still remained set aside as when Kimball had left the place to investigate the strange noises in another part of the house, but the moment the ferret crossed the threshold he stopped and uttered a cry.

"It's not here!" he exclaimed.

Policeman Clipper looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"The phial I left on the table."

"There's nothing in the shape of a bottle on this table, that's certain. But you may have left it elsewhere."

"No; it was placed right here," touching a certain spot in the table cloth; "and the person who stole that phial must be in the house yet—"

"Or got out of it while you were on the street."

Kimball Keene hesitated a moment; then he had vanished, leaving the policeman in the laboratory. He tore down the corridor, past the stairway, and brought up at a window at the far end of it.

The shutters to this window were thrown clear back. They opened out upon a roof which sloped sharply, and Keene knew that the descent would take him to the eave, about twenty feet from the ground.

He threw up the lower sash, which was not fastened, and looked out upon this roof.

By this time Clipper was at the window, and in another moment the detective was over the sill.

"You'll fall, Mr. Keene," he cried, in alarm.

In response, the detective, holding to the sill with one hand, whisked off his shoes with the other, and began to go over the steep roof.

He moved to the edge of it, and from the eave looked down into the back yard.

The next moment there came the sharp

report of a firearm, and Detective Keene threw up his hands, half wheeled, and fell face downward upon the shingles.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNBIDDEN GUEST.

"There's a lady at the door."

Doctor Doom, at these words, turned upon the maid with a frown.

"What is she like, Tressy?"

"I can't see much of her. Her face is veiled and she says she must see Doctor Doom a moment."

"Send her away. Tell her that I don't practice any more—"

"But she won't take no. I can tell that from her actions and if I go back there I shall have to parley with her."

"Bring her in, then," said he, and picking up the fragrant cigar he had laid aside he pretended to be smoking.

The doctor turning his eyes toward the door saw enter the room a woman, at whom he looked with a great deal of interest. He at once wheeled a chair forward for his visitor, who took it, and at the same time raised her veil.

Her face, not handsome, was yet a striking one. Its color was dark and the sallowness of the skin, which looked like polished parchment in the soft light of Doctor Doom's gas jets, caused him to regard it studiously for a moment.

"You will pardon this late visit," said she, "but I am here on an important errand—important to me, at least."

"But you must be aware that I am no longer in regular practice; I abandoned that some years ago."

"I am not here to ask advice in any case demanding professional skill. I am Mrs. Susan Blunt, a widow, and fairly well to do in the world."

At the same time she ingeniously displayed a hand upon which glittered a ring of considerable value.

"Well, Mrs. Blunt, what can I do for you?"

The doctor's visitor leaned forward and took from her pocket a little purse of moleskin, which she opened quietly.

"I would like a situation."

Dallas Doom smiled.

"But, my dear Mrs. Blunt, you have come to the wrong house for that. I have plenty of help, just now. There's Tressy, who opened the door for you, and besides, I have my own daughter, Miss Della."

"You will see what I have here before you dismiss me. Won't you read this?"

She had taken a bit of paper from the purse and was pushing it across the table, when the door suddenly opened and Della came in, but stopped short at sight of the doctor's caller, and her face seemed to lose some of its freshness.

Mrs. Blunt did not seem to notice this.

Doctor Doom, with a glance at Della, took the paper from the woman's hand, while Della tip-toed from the room and left the pair alone.

It was a mere sheet of paper, rather browned, as if with age, and it trembled a little in the hands of the doctor.

Susan Blunt leaned back in her chair and awaited the results of the perusal.

Doctor Doom looked up and studied his visitor's face. He had very little color in his own.

"It's all right, isn't it, doctor?"

"It's a strange matter," he answered. "Really, I had forgotten it, but it is a promise which the years and circumstances have invalidated."

"You reject it, then?"

"I have not said so. But, haven't you another home, Mrs. Blunt? I have told you how we are situated here—have plenty of help and don't need any more."

Susan Blunt's eyes fell to the paper, which had fluttered from the doctor's hand to the table.

Dallas Doom looked from under his arching brows and scowled; but that was all, for suddenly his eyes assumed another look.

They were fastened upon Susan Blunt with magnetic power, and remained so until he saw the woman take in a long

wearisome breath, and seemed as if about to pass into a hypnotic slumber.

But, it was only for a moment. As if capable of resisting the wonderful powers of this mesmerist, she struggled out of the oncoming trance, and looked him calmly in the eye.

"You'll let me stay, won't you?" she persisted. "You'll respect that writing?"

"Where did you get it, madam?"

"My father—"

"Was Philip Manx your father?" broke in Doctor Doom, starting visibly.

"Do you think I would be the possessor of that paper if I were not his child?"

A cold sweat seemed to break out on Doctor Doom's face.

"I'll not go back on that paper," he avowed. "You shall have a room in this house. Wait! I'll call Miss Della; you will have to meet her some time."

He put up his hand and touched an electric button, and in a little while Della came into the room in another dress, which showed off her beautiful figure and seemed to render her face unnaturally pale.

"Della, this lady, Mrs. Blunt, a child of an old acquaintance, will for a time share our house," explained her father.

There was a stiff bow on Della's part, but her dark eyes appeared to flash.

Mrs. Blunt arose and bowed.

"You can have your baggage brought round in the morning," remarked the doctor.

"I have none to bring," was the reply. "My worldly possessions I carry on my back."

"Very well. Tressy will show you to the room you will occupy while you remain underneath our roof. Ah, yes; you will take back the letter. Della, you will tell Tressy that Mrs. Blunt will take immediate possession of the little octagon room next to hers on the third floor."

Susan Blunt took this for a dismissal, and the two left the parlor together.

The moment they had departed Doctor Doom sprang forward in his chair with distended eyes, his face white and his whole form trembling.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "Is that woman the daughter of Philip Manx, or is she some infernal spy? That was my writing; it was the paper—the promise which I gave years and years ago, never expecting to be confronted with it. But here it is, staring me in the face and just at this time, too!"

He threw the cigar into the cuspidor and began to pace the carpet like a tiger.

"Wait! I can play a game she cannot resist. I tried it, and, though she repelled the influence pretty well, I can overcome her!" and he went back to the chair and with half-closed eyes waited for his daughter's return.

Ten minutes elapsed before that occurred.

"Who is that woman?" Della demanded, as she re-entered.

"Susan Blunt, the daughter of an old acquaintance."

"What brings her to this house?"

"She seeks an asylum for a time. She says she is in need of treatment, and brought with her a paper which I could not repudiate. I was compelled to take her in, but she will remain only a few days, at best. I can place her under the spell at any time, Della, and if we suspect her of any dark work, why, we can block the game instantly. But, she may be Susan Blunt, Philip Manx's child, after all."

There was no reply, but the white hand of Della Doom dropped upon the tablecloth in front of her father.

"If she isn't—if I find out that she is an enemy—I'll silence her at once! No spies in this house. That's my motto."

Meantime Susan Blunt was making herself at home in the pretty room to which she had been assigned. It was a chamber, octagon in shape, neatly furnished, and contained two doors. The one which she had not seen opened led she knew not whither, and a mahogany ornament with three shelves hung against it.

She sat down and took a survey of the chamber.

There was no sign of victory in her deep-set eyes now, and her sallow face betrayed no emotion.

She did not know—though perhaps she suspected—that just beyond the hall door stood a motionless figure with one ear to the portal.

This was Tressy, the maid, who had been told to listen there, by a look from Della; but Mrs. Blunt did not give the spy any cause to suspect her.

Tressy went away at last, and a faint smile came to the well chiseled mouth of Susan Blunt.

"I'm here," she said to herself. "I'm in the hawk's nest, and realize that I've got to deport myself accordingly, or feel the sharp talons that kill. I must not forget for an instant that I am Susan Blunt. No, no! The leopard has changed her spots and Sarah Sharp her identity!"

CHAPTER X.

OLD JOZY'S SECRET.

The shot which stretched Detective Keene upon the sloping roof of Raymond Rolfe's house seemed to have finished his career.

Policeman Clipper saw the flash, and caught sight of the figure that threw itself over the low fence at the end of the lot.

The roundsman did not hesitate, but at once crawled out of the window, and managed to reach the form lying on the roof. It was but the work of a moment to drag his friend back into the room, by which time the detective's senses had returned, for he smiled grimly.

"A pretty close call, eh, Clipper?" he said. "I felt the bullet, but, thanks to the hat which it struck, as well as a bit of hard skull, I'm here yet."

Kimball discovered that the bullet had plowed a little furrow underneath the rim of his hat, but, in a few minutes, he seemed himself again.

"Do you think that man carried off the missing phial?" asked Clipper.

"It looks very much that way. He must have been in the house, for the fastenings of the window were loose and the lower sash, always secured by Rolfe, was raised without difficulty. Then, there were boot-marks, fresh ones, on the shingles of the roof. Yes, I should say that I was on the trail of the phial stealer."

"And he got away. It's bad luck," answered the roundsman. "We may pick him up some other time, but just now I must go back to my beat."

"Keep an eye open for night prowlers!" warned the young man, as the policeman went down the stairs. "I'll remain here a while longer."

The front door shut, and the ferret went back to the laboratory.

The vanishing of the phial gave him more real concern than the attempt upon his life. The other phials were in their places so far as he could determine.

He went all over the house, and then was in the death chamber once more, to study still closer the spot on the wall which now had been obliterated, and what he found out we shall see later.

He left the house only when his scrutiny was done, and proceeded to the humble house on the quiet street occupied by Sarah Sharp.

His ring was not answered for a minute, and he was about to quit the steps when "Who is it, sir?" was asked from the inside.

"Sarah's friend."

The door opened an inch and the detective looked into a face he did not know.

"Sarah Sharp don't live here any more," said the person in the hall.

"How's that?"

"Can't tell you. Really, she left no clew to what she intends doing nor how long she may be gone."

"But Sparrow, the little one?"

"Oh, she went off, too; both left just before dark."

Kimball thought a moment. "It's all right, I guess," said he, at length. "I won't bother you," and he marched down the steps.

"I see. She's at work," he decided.

Half an hour later Kimball sat in a little stall in the quietest corner of a restaurant near Broadway, but was not alone, for on the opposite side of the table sat a man whose age might have been sixty, apparently an Israelite, judging by his hook-bill nose and his sallow face, but he was not a Jew.

"Jozy," remarked Keene, "you have heard about the murder in the house on H— street?"

"The killin' of Raymond Rolfe, my old friend?"

"Your old friend, eh? How you delight in lying, Jozy."

A comical expression came over the man's face as he threw up his hands in mock horror.

"I don't blame you much. You have to lie to make money nowadays, like a lot of other people. Rolfe was not your friend, neither was he a very bitter enemy."

"You didn't know just how to take him. Ever since that affair of them bonds he seemed to mistrust me."

"I always thought that, Jozy. He's dead now, and you can reveal the truth. Wasn't Raymond Rolfe concerned in the Brazilian bond affair?"

The old man took a long look at the other, and a sardonic smile seemed to settle around his hard mouth.

"Do you think it had anything to do with—with the mystery of his death?" he asked.

"It may have hastened his exit from the world," answered the detective. "But, come; you did know about those bonds, Jozy. We had them traced very close to your door, but the trail took another spurt in time to save you—"

"But not to catch Rolfe, eh? Well, well, Mr. Keene. I owe you a good deal, don't I?"

"For keeping you out of the muddle? Perhaps you do."

The old man leaned forward and deposited upon the table a coin, which he shoved toward the detective—a ten-dollar gold piece.

"You're very liberal, Jozy," smiled Keene, pushing the money back. "You know what I prefer just now. There's immunity for you, Jozy, for the bond business won't be opened up again."

"You swear it, Kimball?" and the little face relaxed, and the eyes, deeply-set, got a strange glitter.

"You might have made it if you had taken the bull by the horns and arrested Raymond Rolfe on a certain day," he averred. "Rolfe was the right person at a certain time. The police thought that, but they had no proof. Ha, ha, ha! But he is dead, and I have't anything to show for handling those bonds."

"What became of the last batch you fabricated?"

"They must be in his house—in the secret room behind the laboratory."

"Is there a room there?"

"Yes; hardly that wide," and the speaker illustrated his sentence by measuring with his hands on the table. "Kimball, I am not to be taken now, am I?"

"Not for the world, Jozy. Who forged those bonds? The writing upon them was marvelous."

"Ah, she could do that! She was the most wonderful creature I ever saw with the pen, although but a young girl."

"A young girl?" echoed Keene.

"Yes, yes. But she wrote under a spell. That was more remarkable than anything connected with the whole thing."

"How could this fair forger write under a spell, Jozy?"

"Ah, you should have seen her. You've heard of such things, Kimball. You know that the mind can be guided by mesmerism."

"Oh, that was the spell?"

"Just so," and the old man leaned again across the table and touched the detective's arm. "He's the strangest man under the sun. He makes me shudder when I meet him. I don't go there any more, and he never crosses my path. Those Brazilian bonds ruined me. I am poor, Kimball. I have nothing but my little den on

Cherry street; but I shall never forget how she wrote under her father's spell—her father, Doctor Dallas Doom. There, you have it!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE SPIDER'S WEB.

The following day the last will and testament of Raymond Rolfe was taken from the little box in the Security Deposit Building in Wall street and duly opened in presence of several people.

It was a startling surprise, almost as great a one as the murder of the testator himself.

Bastien Blue, one of those present, lost color, and with a start took the paper from the hand of the man who broke the seal.

"Let me see that," he cried. "My God! There must be some mistake here!"

"It is in black and white, Mr. Blue. You are the beneficiary of your half-brother's will—"

"But Oriel—Oriel understands that she was to have the bulk of his estate."

The young man took the paper and leaned toward the light. They saw him go over the startling bequest slowly, as if he doubted the evidence of sight; but at last he handed it back with a long, labored breath.

"It is there. I can't gainsay what I see with my own eyes. He must have changed his mind."

"Men are liable to do that, especially when they have large estates to dispose of."

The document was duly placed in the proper hands, after which the little company left the room.

Bastien Blue seemed dazed. There was little color on his face and his eyes seemed to stare at everything they met. He hardly knew where he went, and when he found himself upon the door-steps of Doctor Doom's magnificent mansion he looked up with a sudden quiver.

He put out his hand and touched the bell button, mechanically, and when admitted, he walked into the parlor, where he dropped into a chair and looked strangely round the room.

He was alone five minutes, long enough for him to recover his wits, when Dallas Doom came in.

"The hypnotist looked at the young man and smiled."

There seemed to lurk at the doctor's lips a cynical expression, and his eyes scintillated with that mesmeric light which had such a terrible control over human minds.

"You don't look well," said he, advancing.

"I'm feeling a little out of tune, and no wonder."

"Not much sleep last night, perhaps. Here, I'll fix you."

Bastien watched the doctor, who moved across the room to a sideboard, which he opened, and presently he came back, carrying glass and decanter.

Bastien put out his hand, but the doctor poured out a glass of wine and forced it upon him.

"It's a nerve maker," said he, in his insinuating tones. "It will banish all shadows and you'll be your old self in less than five minutes."

Bastien drained the glass with a feverish gulp, and quickly his eyes got a new light; they seemed to dance with passion and he laughed in an unnatural manner.

"I told you so," said Dallas Doom, setting glass and bottle upon the table as if to have them handy. "Now, what is it?" he asked.

Bastien thought of the will and his eyes became riveted upon the magic doctor.

"It gave me a shock, and strange too, when it enriches me beyond all expectation: brother's will, you know."

"Indeed? You're in luck. It was better than you thought, eh?"

"I should say so. What right had I to expect more than a comfortable share of his wealth? I never dreamed of getting all of it, nor that there was to be but a poverty-stricken bequest for Oriel—a poor ten thousand."

"That will fix her."

Bastien stared at the speaker.

"But I get over eight hundred thousand!"

"You deserve it, boy," and, smiling like a satyr, he patted Bastien on the shoulder.

"Was my name appended to the document as witness?" asked Doom.

"I believe it was."

"Then that was the will I signed a few months ago without knowing anything about its contents. He did not see fit to tell me, and I didn't care to show enough curiosity to inquire about it. By jove! This is golden luck."

"But, what will Oriel say?"

"Whatever she says will not invalidate the will nor make you one dollar poorer. You were his nearest of kin, you know. Oriel, the girl, was nothing but a ward, and not a drop of Rolfe blood runs through her veins. She might have expected, but her expectations didn't pan out, that's all."

Doctor Doom fell back in his arm-chair and looked at his visitor, who sat upright in the opposite chair with a look of wonderment and surprise still in his eyes.

"What are they doing about the death of Raymond?" asked the doctor.

"It remains as much a mystery to-day as it was when we entered the house that night and found him dead on the floor."

"And Miss Oriel has never explained her presence in the room of the iron door? Do you think they suspect her?"

"What, suspect Oriel of committing that diabolical crime?" and Bastien almost sprang from his chair.

"I didn't intend to shock you again," grinned the doctor. "I merely asked a question. Come, you must acknowledge that, from a detective's standpoint, such suspicions would not be unnatural. She had access to the house at all hours—had a key, I believe, and knew what we thought no one but the dead man knew—the secret of the iron door. Now, why was she there at that hour? He was dead in the room below. She admitted—admitted it to you that night—that she knew he had been killed."

Bastien seemed to lose his breath before such an evident accusation.

"My God! You don't accuse her, I hope," he cried.

"Not at all," with another smile. "I only say that I think she should explain now, if ever."

What more might have been said cannot be told, for at that juncture the door opened and Della Doom swept into the parlor.

Her dark eyes seemed to catch fire the moment they alighted upon Bastien and she came forward with an imperious tread.

"You must congratulate Bastien," said Dallas Doom, with a glance at his daughter, which she seemed to understand. "The will has just been opened and he is the heir."

"Well! well!" cried Della, with a sudden glow. "This is a pleasure, indeed! You are very happy, Bastien?"

She was looking down upon him with a look of triumph.

"I am still thunderstruck," was the reply. "I did not expect it, for I believed all along that Miss Oriel was to have the bulk of his wealth."

"What entitled her to it?" was the instant rejoinder. "You are the next of kin, and he owed it to you to make you his heir. Besides this, look at the breaking down of the iron door and what you saw there with your own eyes."

A sudden pallor came over Bastien's face, and his gaze fell beneath the passionate glances of the beautiful girl.

"Shall I drink your health, Bastien?" continued Della, espying the wine. "I'll wager much that papa hasn't thought of that?"

Bastien watched the jeweled hand pour out the wine and caught the glitter of the eyes that sparkled like the liquor.

"Don't!" he cried, suddenly springing up. "I don't want the accursed inheritance. Oriel can take my share and I'll

take hers. It looks like blood money. He might have changed the will if he had not been cut down—"

"I knew Raymond Rolfe. His mind once made up was as irrevocable as the laws of the Medes and Persians—"

"You knew him—that well?" and Bastien turned full upon Della. "I never knew you had more than a mere speaking acquaintance with my half-brother. When did you ever meet him? Will you tell me that, Miss Della?"

"Never mind when," was the retort. "You are his heir, now. You inherit his fortune, and you must now carry out your written promise."

"My written promise?"

One of Della's hands went up to her bosom and a folded paper came forth, delicately but triumphantly held between finger and thumb.

"This is the promise you gave us. Look! You don't repudiate it, do you?"

Bastien looked but once, and uttered a cry, which was half a scream.

It was a written promise to marry the girl before him!

CHAPTER XII.

THE SPY AT HER WORK.

Bastien sat like one in a maze before the doctor and his daughter.

"It is your handwriting, is it not?" asked Della, holding the paper before his face.

"Be calm," said Doctor Doom, in his quiet, insinuating tones. "You don't intend to repudiate the promise, do you?"

"Heavens! When did I sign that document?" And Bastien passed his hands over his forehead as if to recall the moment, but he could not.

"Let me see it again, please."

The girl, with a hasty look at her father, placed it in his hand.

"It all seems a dream," cried he. "I cannot recall the signing. I must have been under a spell, for you know, Miss Della, that I have never offered you my hand—never. There must be—"

"Enough!" interrupted Dallas Doom, rising and facing the victim of the plot. "Let there be an end to this! You can destroy the paper, if you wish, but beware!"

Bastien flushed angrily, and looked at the man, whose eyes seemed to look to the young man's soul, and the threatening word sounded in his ears like a knell of doom. He tried to overcome the spell, tried to shake off the terrible power which once again seemed to take full possession of him, but in vain.

Near the table stood Della, her figure drawn to its queenly height, and her eyes regarding him with triumph, while she awaited the victory of the mesmerizer.

And this was the tableau which other eyes than theirs beheld, for above, leaning far over the banisters, and gazing in over the half open transom, stood the new guest—the dissembling Sarah Sharp—motionless as a statue.

"Again in their power!" she murmured. "I must see and know all!"

She saw the young girl advance toward the table and stop in front of Bastien Blue, sitting dazed-like in the chair which faced the magic doctor.

She saw Doctor Doom pass his hands before the young man's face, and in another instant Bastien sat upright.

"You admit it now, don't you?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, yes."

"You wrote that promise—wrote it solemnly?" (the paper had been placed in his hand, and he was gazing at it). "It is a promise to marry my child. You wrote it, you say?"

"I did."

"And you swear to carry it out?"

Bastien seemed to hesitate.

"We want something to bind the promise. Give my daughter your ring."

Bastien tugged at the ring which glittered on his finger, and Della, smiling triumphantly, held out her hand. In a moment more it was on her own finger, placed there by Bastien's trembling hands.

Della then drew back and held her hand

up in the light so that it shone on the ring, causing its single diamond to flash in the rays of the brilliant jet.

"He is ours now," she said.

"Aye, you may well say that. Ours—ours in every way! You can go now, Della."

The girl started for the door. At the same moment, Susan Blunt, the willing witness, passed noiselessly up to her own room.

"Ours at last!" ejaculated Della Doom, in audible tones, as she stopped in the hall a second. "Eight hundred thousand is worth playing for."

As she came up the beautiful demoness paused at the door of Susan Blunt's room and listened.

All was silent in the chamber, and by and by Della passed on to her own room.

As for Bastien Blue, he remained ten minutes longer in the parlor below, and when he rose to go Doctor Doom offered no objection.

Only he said:

"You will find the doors of this house open to you at all times. You are ever welcome here, Bastien, and we will try to make it homelike for you."

Homelike! It made the young man shudder, but he seemed to regain his composure, and in another minute he found himself on the pavement.

"My God! In what sort of net am I?" he exclaimed, as he recalled what had transpired. "When did I sign that accursed promise? When was I fool enough to throw myself into that girl's snare? What means all this? The startling provisions of the will?—the wealth that comes to me when he had positively promised it to Oriel? Does Oriel know it? Won't she accuse me of duplicity—of forgery? of all manners of crime? Heavens! I am on the verge of ruin! There must be some infernal conspiracy afoot, but who is at the head of it? I shall go mad if another night of this kind confronts me."

He sprang into the first cab which came by, and settling back in the darkest corner, gave himself up to the most distressful thoughts.

Twenty minutes later he entered his own richly-furnished chamber, and, jerking the cord suspended over the table, he soon heard some one rushing down the stairs.

Royal Flush dashed into the room.

"You, Royal?" cried Bastien. "Thank Heaven! Something terrible has happened. I am in a snare of some kind. I am surrounded by enemies who seek my ruin. Look! I have lost my ring. I dare not tell you where I think it is. What do you know? What are the detectives doing? Has Kimball Keene picked up any clew yet. Go out and tell him that I want to see him. No, no! I promised not to interfere, and that might be doing it. But, Royal, witness that I did not kill him. You were with me that night—"

"Not all the time, Bastien. Part of the time I was at the gymnasium. I cannot account for your movements then."

CHAPTER XIII.

A TERRIBLE SENTENCE.

The secret room behind the chamber of the iron door!

Kimball Keene did not forget what old Jozy had told him.

After leaving the old man in Cherry street, in his den-like place, which he always carefully locked, whether he was in or out, the detective made his way back to the house of the crime.

It was not difficult to enter the house at that hour, for he knew the way, and he gained access by the rear door.

Once more the sole tenant of the place, which seemed to possess a singular fascination for him, the dauntless detective made his way first to the scene of the mysterious death, thence to the laboratory.

In the upper corridor he stopped suddenly, for he caught the swish of garments, and the next instant Oriel stood before him!

The young girl recoiled a moment, when she caught sight of the young man, but, reassured, she came toward him, a faint smile upon her pallor-stricken face.

"I was wishing for you," she said. "Yet I dared not hope to meet you here."

"You came hither alone?"

"I hope so. I have heard about the will—that strange will, so unlike what he told me the last time he talked about the disposition of his property."

"He virtually left you out of it."

"I care not for that," exclaimed Oriel. "That is not what causes wonder. I am no relative of his, only the child of a friend to whom he was once under obligations; but he always told me that all he had, with the exception of perhaps twenty thousand, which was intended for Bastien Blue, the half-brother, should be mine. It seems to me that there is some dark influence at work. I have come to this house to investigate. There is a secret room somewhere—one which I have never entered. I suspected its existence long ago—merely suspected it, nothing more. I may be mistaken. There must be a room of that kind somewhere, for I have searched the rest of the house, and some things which must exist cannot be found."

They stood together in the laboratory, the light of which revealed the little room with its displaced iron door.

"Have you sounded the walls?"

"All of them," she answered. "I had high hopes of finding the secret compartment by a search of the death room beneath us. The secret of the opening and closing of the iron door lay in the pressing of a button in that room. That button is set in the wall near where you saw the dark splotch, which, most singular to say, has been rubbed out since I was last here. I discovered it by the merest chance, and from that moment I knew how to open the iron gate."

"Always before coming up-stairs to the laboratory he pressed the button in that room, and some delicate but powerful machinery which operated behind the walls unlocked the keyless door, and then he came up. The door locked itself when closed, and thus he had no need of a key."

"Now," continued Oriel, "if there is a secret compartment other than the laboratory, we must find it."

"Where shall we begin?"

"Let us try this very room. It seems to me that, as the laboratory was guarded by the iron door, he would naturally connect it with the missing chamber."

They went to work, and Detective Keene soon saw that Oriel was familiar with the laboratory and its mysterious appointments.

"The way to the hidden chamber cannot be by the green cupboard," said the ferret, with a smile, as he opened the door of the poison cupboard and turned to the girl.

"No, I would not think it can be; but—What has become of the little phial?"

She had come forward and stood beside him with eyes staring at a certain shelf.

"It was there when I saw it last. Don't you remember I told you in the carriage that the phial was sealed with green wax and had a memorandum on the bottom telling just how many red globules he had placed in it?"

"I recall your description."

"But it is gone. Have you been here since?"

He looked at her calmly.

"I have been here."

"And have carried off the phial? I don't blame you, for you must do whatever you think best, being the detective in this case; but I was startled to see that the phial was not there."

"I handled it, but did not carry it off."

"No? Then, where is it?"

Kimball Keene shook his head.

"You don't know, I see? Some one else has been here—some one interested in the disappearance of that phial. Ah, if we had but carried it off in the first place! Why didn't we think of that? Perhaps you did."

The detective made no reply, but turned to the cupboard and looked at the glass tubes and little phials, all sealed with green wax, that stood side by side on the velvet-covered shelves.

Then he told Oriel about the adventure

in which he had seen the veiled woman in the hall, and how the phial had vanished, and how he was shot at by the man in the garden.

She listened with bated breath.

Not for a moment did her eyes remove their light from him, and when he had finished she spoke:

"Dressed in black and veiled? Not very tall, you tell me, Mr. Keene? Was she as tall as I am?"

"A little taller than you are, miss, I think," answered Kimball.

"It is all very strange, and it seems to me that the mystery deepens, does it not? But now, don't let us delay in our hunt for the hidden chamber."

She crossed the room and threw aside a curtain which hung from ceiling to floor.

The light penetrating the place showed a few shelves strewn with scientific apparatus, and Oriel was about to step back when the detective advanced toward the shelves.

"Look! These shelves are so fastened together that they can be moved outward," said he, at the same time taking hold of one of the boards and moving the whole toward him.

"They can. And there is the hidden room!"

A few things dropped to the floor at the detective's feet, and a little dust sifted down, but he went on.

The swinging back of the shelves revealed a wall which gave forth no sign of a door, but, in another second, the searcher had put his body between the shelves and the wall and was feeling the latter with eager hands.

Oriel stood a few steps away, looking on breathlessly, and with eager eyes.

Suddenly a cry escaped her.

"You have found it! What eyes you have, Mr. Keene!"

"Eyes in one's finger ends, miss," replied the young man, as a door slid aside, revealing a narrow room, the existence of which no one would have suspected from outward signs.

Oriel crowded in after Keene, and they found themselves in a little cramped place, hardly large enough for one person, and dark and musty.

"The lamp!" cried Oriel, springing back and catching up a little lamp from a bench in the laboratory. "We can't see without a light, Mr. Keene."

The detective took the lamp from her and held it above his head. It almost touched the ceiling, and as its light fell round about them they scrutinized the place.

Dust lay thick on everything, and the cupboard, apparently set in one of the walls, looked stubborn enough to keep them out a long time.

"This must be the place," declared Oriel. "Here is where he sometimes buried himself while living in this house. But, what will we find here?"

At one end of the room stood a low table with an old-fashioned lamp upon it, and around which the detective saw bits of burned paper, but before proceeding to examine these he turned to the cupboard, where Oriel already stood.

"There is something beyond those doors. I am sure of it," she asserted.

Keene took hold of the brass handle of one of the doors and a smart jerk pulled it open.

Three narrow shelves were exposed, all filled with documents.

The young man lifted out a package.

"Old papers," said Oriel, but the detective's eyes flashed.

He carried the package to the table; he cut the cord that bound it without ceremony, and the papers fell apart.

"What are they?" demanded Oriel.

"Don't you know?" and the ferret held up a document.

"These are the famous Brazilian bonds—the forged bonds which puzzled us all a year ago," he announced.

"I heard of them at the time. I heard Raymond Rolfe and Doctor Doom laughing about them, and wondering when the police would catch the forgers."

"In this house?"

"In the room where you found him dead."

Leaving the bonds on the table, Keene went back to the cupboard, and saw behind a lot of papers something that shone like a bit of tin.

He pulled forth a little polished box of iron with a brass padlock hanging from the steel staple, and Oriel clasped her hands when her gaze fell upon it.

"That is where he kept the will!" cried she. "One day when he was very talkative he told me what his will contained, and going up-stairs, he came back with that box under his arm, and said that it held the treasures of this house. Subsequently he intimated that the will was with the Security Deposit Company; but I believe that the true will is in that box."

"Then you don't consider the one opened the right one?"

"I cannot. Heaven forgive me the terrible suspicion. But, open the box. Break the lock!"

The young man hesitated, seeing which Oriel caught up a paper-weight from the low table, and struck the staple a blow which snapped it.

"Now I shall see," cried she, clutching the lid of the box. "If it is here it will prove that the other is a forged document and that it is connected with the darker crime of this house. I will know—Merciful Heavens! what is this?"

She had looked into the iron box; she had seen the white paper which covered the entire bottom, and had read the great black sentence which stared her in the face:

"My blood is upon the hands of Oriel Orne."

"RAYMOND ROLFE."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT ORIEL SAW.

No wonder Oriel recoiled aghast and stared at that terrible box, not a vestige of color in her face.

"In Heaven's name who penned that horrid line?" cried the young girl. "What does it say? The blood of Raymond Rolfe upon my hands? Look at them, Mr. Keene! Are they red? Can you see a mark of murder on them?" and she held out the whitened members and looked at them with staring eyes.

The detective reassured her as best he could, and turned to the iron box, lifting the accusing paper.

"You have seen his handwriting, Miss Oriel?" said he.

"A thousand times."

"What do you say to that?"

"It is like it—fatally like it, in every particular."

More calm, Oriel took the paper from Detective Keene's hand and carried it over to the lamp.

"I never saw anything like this," said she. "He must have written it, for he had a peculiar way of shading his letters, and it is here. But that he should have locked up that awful line in the box! It is horrible."

Together the two bent over the paper and looked at it a moment in deep silence.

"Let us look again," at length urged the girl, and she let the paper flutter to the table, and turned with Detective Keene to a further search of the little place.

The cupboard gave them nothing more for their trouble—a few parcels of old papers, that was all. The receptacle had given up nothing but the Brazilian bonds and the iron box and its contents, but they were enough!

Kimball Keene hid the bonds in his bosom and looked at Oriel while her eyes rested on the accusing paper.

He seemed to read what was passing through her mind, for all at once he picked up the bit of paper and placed it in her hand.

"The lamp is before you, miss," said he.

Oriel started and a shudder passed over her frame.

"That would almost be a confession of guilt," she cried. "No, no! I cannot. I will keep this, and some day the hand

that is supposed to have traced it will be cleared of crime."

She handed it to him, continuing:

"Guard it for me, Mr. Keene. I rely on you to keep it for the day of vengeance."

Detective Keene accepted the trust with a bow, and the terrible writing followed the Brazilian bonds to the inner pocket.

The iron box with the broken fastening was restored to the hidden cupboard and the door of the secret room closed. They had disturbed the dust of the compartment very little, and other papers hid the box as the Brazilian bonds had done.

Oriel went down-stairs after the ferret, outwardly calm, but she was laboring under intense excitement.

"I want to show you," she said to Kimball, when they reached the door of the room of the crime. "Here is the secret button in the wall, here where you saw the splotch of red, and where now is a blurr on the paper. I press it, but there is no iron door to open. Royal Flush, Bastien's friend, broke it down and destroyed the connection. Raymond had but to press the button whenever he wanted to enter the laboratory, and the secret mechanism which is behind the wall unlocked the iron portal. As I have told you, I discovered the secret by the merest accident. Others might have done the same or have wormed the secret from him, I can't say which."

"He had visitors, then?"

"Very few. The one who came oftenest was Doctor Dallas Doom."

"You have seen him here?"

"A few times."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He is handsome as men of his age go, but I never liked him. May I be forgiven for that dislike if it does him injustice. He came to see Raymond Rolfe sometimes, but always alone. They talked about chemicals and such things, and, as I once overheard, about the Brazilian bonds which created such excitement at the time."

"Where were they then?"

"In this very room. I had come down to the house to see him, as he was not very well at the time, and I had to wait until Doctor Doom went away. It was strange that those visits always left Raymond weak and nervous. Afterward his first move was to the laboratory, and there he remained closeted with his chemicals for some time. When he would come down-stairs he seemed recruited in nerves; but was always deathly white."

"You did not see anything of Doctor Doom the night of the crime, miss?"

"Nothing," answered Oriel, with another light start.

"How long have you known Bastien Blue, Miss Oriel?" he suddenly asked.

"About ten years, or shortly after I became a ward of Raymond Rolfe's."

"He is really a half-brother?"

"I know nothing to the contrary."

"They didn't look very much alike."

"That is true. Raymond Rolfe, as you may have heard, spent a good deal of his life in the tropics. Bastien never saw them, I believe."

"You are on friendly terms?"

"Quite so."

"He has never tried to injure your interests?"

"Never!" said Oriel, quickly. "While he seemed to understand that I was to become the main legatee of the will, he never intimated that he thought it wrong."

"You once said—the night we rode to your house in the carriage—that Bastien Blue seemed under the influence of the Dooms."

"I regretted those words as soon as uttered," was the reply. "I even hoped you would not remember them."

"But they were true?"

The young girl did not reply for a second.

"I must say that I believe I spoke the truth at the time," she said, at last.

"How under the influence of the Dooms?"

"I cannot, dare not, tell you. Bastien is, after all, a man of kind impulses. He is too indulgent, at times, but, at the same time, he has a spirit which injures him."

"He is on good terms with the Dooms?"

"I believe so."

This inquisition seemed to be getting irksome to Oriel Orne, and she resented it gently by answering slowly.

"One more question," persisted the other. "I do not want to keep you on the rack. But do you recall any meeting with the doctor's daughter, Miss Della Doom?"

There was a start which the fair girl could not suppress, and it seemed to stagger her.

"We are not on terms," she answered.

"But you have met her?"

"Once," was the answer. "I recall a meeting with Miss Doom—in this house."

"Oh! She accompanied her father hither, did she?"

"Not that night! She came alone."

Detective Keene did not proceed, but suddenly Oriel's hand dropped upon his arm and her gaze met his.

"I want to cast suspicion upon no one who might not have had a hand in this dark work. You will understand that, Mr. Keene. I never saw Miss Doom but the one time, and that, as I have said, was under this roof."

"It was just three weeks before the murder. I had come down to call on Mr. Rolfe, who had had another of his strange spells, which he told me resulted from a snake bite in Brazil. He had been ailing a few days, and I came down to look after his welfare. I let myself into the house as softly as possible, for during these attacks he was very nervous. I looked into this room, where he was usually to be found, but he was not here."

"Then I bethought myself of the laboratory and went up-stairs. I was in the hall when I heard the swish of a garment at the further end of it, and, falling back into the darkest corner, which fortunately offered me a place of concealment, I looked down the corridor. There is a little chamber at the end of the hall, as you may have noticed. The door of that room had opened and a woman came forth. I looked with stilled heart and starful eyes and toward me came a beautiful young girl, who I felt was Della Doom from the resemblance of her face to the doctor's."

"You may imagine my thoughts, Mr. Keene. I seemed to sink into the wall, for as I watched her, her face appeared to glow with a sort of inhuman triumph, and she vanished down the steps. I glided to the head of the stairs to watch her and saw her enter the room where we now stand."

"My first thoughts after losing her was to fly to the little chamber at the end of the corridor, but the iron door opened and Mr. Rolfe emerged from the laboratory. He did not see me as he came toward the stairs, for I hastily fell back to the wall and saw him descend to the room below, where, in a short time, I heard voices."

"Not until Della Doom had left the house did I show myself to him, and then I let myself out first and came back, giving him the impression that I had just come in."

"What is in the little room at the end of the corridor—or, rather, what was it used for at that time?"

"It contained, then, a few old books on three shelves—books which told about poisons. Raymond Rolfe used to lock himself in there and read them by the hour. The room has no window and he had to study by lamplight. But, when Della Doom came out of that chamber it was as dark as Egypt. The light coming up from below and spreading along the corridor, showed her to me."

"You could not have been mistaken, Miss Oriel?"

"No, no! That girl was the living image of Doctor Doom."

Oriel ceased and cast her eyes about

the room, fixing them at last upon the faint blur on the wall.

"It is a strange case—very strange," said Kimball Keene, half aloud; but the sharp ears of his companion caught the words.

"Didn't the police sergeant call it an easy one?" she asked.

"Mr. Slipper? Yes, miss, he designated it an easy case; but Mr. Slipper looks at things in a light peculiarly his own."

"I know that. When I grew white upon seeing that bit of paper which he showed me, having found it in Raymond Rolfe's pocket, he took it for granted that I was the guilty person. I don't blame Mr. Slipper. It was damaging evidence in his mind. But here is where the dark stain was on the wall. I thought when I first saw it that I made out the impression of fingers on the paper; but I might have been mistaken. I see nothing of them now. Oh, Mr. Keene! I shudder when I think of you going to the end of this case. You may net the innocent!"

"I will net the guilty," firmly replied the detective. "I believe you innocent, Miss Oriel, and I don't believe that a speck of Raymond Rolfe's blood is on Bastien Blue's hands."

"Thank Heaven for that!" cried Oriel, with a flush. "I am willing to answer for him, too."

CHAPTER XV. TIGER PLAY.

The middle of the afternoon of the following day Doctor Doom was seen to come down the steps of his mansion and enter a cab, which at once started away.

Half a minute later a young man crossed the street in front of the house and rang.

The door was opened by Tressy, the maid, who seemed to be dressed for a privileged stroll, for she was habited in a walking dress.

Tressy looked at the young man, who was handsome and athletic, and waited for him to speak.

"Is Miss Doom in?" he asked, looking down the hall toward the parlor door.

Tressy did not know what to say, but, just then, a call from the floor above said to admit the gentleman.

Tressy conducted him to the parlor, where, taking an arm-chair, he amused himself looking over the paintings and other things which betokened great wealth.

In a little while the door swung open to reveal Della.

There was a slight start on her part as her eyes fell upon the caller, but she came forward with a pleasant face and dropped into a chair near her visitor.

"To whom am I indebted for this call?" she asked.

"You seem to have forgotten me," was answered. "You don't recall the meeting in the Park last summer?"

"Oh, you are Mr. Flush!"

"Yes, Miss Doom, I am Royal Flush."

Della looked away, and the young man, watching her like a hawk, saw her face change color.

"Papa has just gone out," she said.

"I have not called to see the doctor. I am here to talk with you, miss."

With a flash of fire underneath her long silken lashes, the girl looked at him again.

Tressy had gone out; Della had heard the door close behind the maid and realized that she was alone in the house with Royal Flush, save the presence of Susan Blunt on the third floor.

"I had not expected this call," she resumed.

"I suppose not. I came without an invitation. The fact is, I'm a little needy just now, and would like to see a few bills."

"Money?" cried Della, almost choking. "You don't come to say that I will be expected to give you money just as if I were your banker?"

"You may be my banker, all the same. The truth is, Miss Doom, I am in real want. I don't look so—I'll admit that—"

(he glanced down at his clothes, which were fashionable). "I don't look like a beggar, yet all the same my purse is very light."

She scanned him sharply.

There seemed something dangerous about this man—something absolutely threatening, and Della felt her blood run hot to her finger tips while she surveyed him.

"You have a master," said she, taking a long breath. "I believe you are in Mr. Blue's employ, and you must know that he inherits largely through the unfortunate death of his half-brother."

"Blood money!" laughed Royal Flush, with a sneering toss of his head. "But, just now, I'm not dealing with Bastien Blue. I am dealing with Miss Della Doom, the daughter of my old friend, Doctor Dallas Doom."

"How your old friend?" demanded Della, with a start. "When did you become familiar with my father?"

"Before he became so immensely rich," was the quick answer. "Before he undertook getting money by hypnotism."

The cheeks of the young girl paled.

"You insinuate, sir."

"Of course I do. I knew your father before he robbed people by opening their purses through the accursed gift of hypnotic power."

"Beware! You are speaking of my father."

Flush leaned back in his chair and for a moment studied the beautiful, yet indignant, face before him.

"I'm aware of the relationship," he said, insultingly. "You see it's little of a secret—never has been."

There was no reply for a moment, but the face of the young girl became tensely drawn with rage.

"Let's come down to business. I'm a little poverty stricken this afternoon and you must be my banker."

"You should refer your wants to the doctor."

"I prefer to refer them to you. I must have a few hundred."

"Why not bankrupt me at once?"

"I don't care to become a Croesus all at once," was the grinning response. "You needn't give me a check, as you might not care to let the bank know that I've had dealings of a financial character with you."

He was disgustingly cool.

"You always have a few odd hundreds about the house," he went on.

"You profess to know our circumstances very well."

"Come, that is an admission. I will take, say, three hundred."

"It is robbery!"

"Robbery on a genteel scale, eh?"

"It's downright pillage."

"That's a polite name for it, I suppose."

Della made no reply to this, but watched him from the corners of her eyes.

Flush took out his watch and looked at it a second as if making a mental calculation.

"I don't care to take up your time, miss. I prefer to take the money."

Della made no reply to this, but between her visitor and herself. She looked across the space that separated them and appeared to swallow hard.

The very coolness of this accomplished rascal was gall. He even opened a cigar box which was on the table and sighed when he saw that it was empty. Doctor Doom had taken the last "trinadado" away with him.

"You don't seem to care to know why I want the money?" glancing at Della.

No response.

"You don't want to know by what authority I demand—for I do demand—the three hundred?"

"You would evade the question if I put it."

"You might try me, miss?"

But Della did not try; she looked across the room an instant and then let her gaze wander back to his hard, cold face.

"You don't keep that much money

about you; but it is in the house—probably in your own chamber."

She flushed to her temples and shut her hands hard.

"It is up-stairs in my room. I'll go and get it."

"I beg pardon," he retorted, rising with her and looking toward the hall. "I'll go with you, miss."

"With me?" gasped Della, shrinking from him.

"Why not? You needn't fear any harm. I'm a gentleman, though not one of the best, in your estimation, perhaps. I'll go with you, miss. Up-stairs, eh? Which floor, please?"

She stood before him like a marble statue, her face as white as one and her form rigidly planted on the carpet.

"You won't go a step with me!" she almost hissed. "I will go to my room alone or not at all."

"All right! I can overstay my time, if you are stubborn. I can break my engagement, but I am here for a little accommodation, and I can't leave without it."

Della thought her trained ears caught at this juncture the sound of feet overhead.

Was Susan Blunt moving about, and was she playing eavesdropper on what was passing between her and Royal Flush?

It was only for a moment, and then she heard nothing more.

"The night I met you in the Park—it was so long ago as last summer, you recollect—long before your father made so very much money, I made a little love—"

"Don't mention that!" cried Della, with a sudden start. "Please don't refer to that affair."

"Just as you like. I am inclined to be accommodating and I expect to be met at least half-way, this afternoon."

"You want three hundred dollars, you say? Very well. I cannot oblige you if you will not let me get the money."

She looked toward the door again and now seemed to wish for Susan Blunt to come to her rescue.

"I'll go with you, I said. Come! We will go, but I will not enter the room, won't go further than the door, which you will keep open while you get the money."

Della did not stir.

"Come, we'll go—now!" he went on, taking her arm in his hand and letting it close there. "You won't, eh? You don't believe I have any sort of hold on you? I half believe you think I am playing a game of bluff."

"I don't know what sort of game you are playing, but I do know that it is robbery."

Royal Flush went back to the chair, but did not sit down.

He stooped over the table and drew toward him a half sheet of note paper, but did not attempt to write; rather, he thrust one hand into his right waistcoat pocket and drew out something little, round and red, between finger and thumb.

Della got a glimpse of it and her teeth set hard.

Royal Flush did not appear to notice this, for he was watching the object, which was a glass sphere, filled with a reddish liquid.

The heat of his hands seemed to make the contents of the glass ball bubble, and he exposed the globe to Della's gaze.

During all this time he said nothing; his actions were doing the "talking," as it were.

The Magic Doctor's child watched him with intense curiosity, and her breath seemed to have been stopped by the sight of the red ball.

"You know something now," said he, at last. "I guess the glass sphere has done the talking."

"You dare not remain here till my father comes home."

"I dare not, you say? By Jove! I will! I'd just like to deal with him," and he took the chair again, but Della exclaimed:

"Put up that thing and follow me!"

She walked out into the hall and Royal Flush, with a gleam of victory in his eyes, glided at her heels.

His bold play had succeeded.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FLIGHT OF A BIRD.

The doctor's daughter went up-stairs, with Royal Flush immediately behind her.

The girl, white-faced, did not once look back, and when they reached the door of her boudoir she turned and said:

"We are here. The money is yonder."

"All right. I'll remain here till you get it."

She opened the door and he stopped at the threshold, looking after her with a grimace of satisfaction on his face.

Della thought fifty things at once as she entered her room; she thought of turning suddenly on the man and finishing him in his tracks, or of bluntly refusing him the money, daring him to do his worst.

But she did neither.

Watched by Royal, she went to a little cabinet at one side of the room, and, unlocking it, took out a pocketbook, which she opened in his presence.

He waited until she had counted out some bills; the next moment she was in the hall again.

"Come, we will go back," said she, and they went down-stairs in the order of their ascent.

In the parlor she handed him the roll and looked him in the face like a person who intends not to forget.

"Do you want what I've got?" asked he, his hand moving toward his waistcoat pocket.

She thought of the glass ball, but waved his hand back.

"Keep it. It is nothing to me," and she looked away as if she had at that moment heard a noise in the hall or on the stairway.

"Just as you like, miss," grinned Royal. "I have overstayed my time. Good morning!"

She stepped aside to let him pass, and, as his back was for a moment turned toward her, her right hand slid into the pocket of her dress, but remained there.

"Not now," she said under her breath. "Some other time, and it will come soon. I will show this wretch that I can play a hand greater and deadlier than any he can hope to hold."

Della let her visitor depart, unmolested; then she was alone in the house, with Susan Blunt.

In an instant she seemed to think of their dangerous guest, and walking into the main hall, she stopped at the foot of the stairs and listened, her eyes riveted upon the ceiling of the second landing.

"Did I hear her while he was here?" she said, inaudibly. "I certainly heard something like footsteps up there. Ah, my sly guest, let me catch you on the watch, and your life won't be worth that!" and she snapped her dainty fingers, while her dark eyes flashed.

Della Doom went back into the parlor, and, reclining on a rich sofa, waited for her father.

In a little while she sank into a doze, which became a sleep, and when she awoke it was evening.

She sprang up and ran from the parlor with a little cry of affright.

"What a fool I've been, to sleep on guard," she exclaimed. "Here I have let several hours drag by with no one to watch our guest. Where is papa?"

She opened the door of the library, but the room was untenanted. Then she ascended the stairs, and with the key unlocked another door, revealing a small laboratory, not unlike the fatal one in Raymond Rolfe's house; but it, too, was empty.

Doctor Doom had not come back.

Once on the upper landing, Della stopped and threw a savage glance toward Susan Blunt's room.

She longed to see beyond the door and note what the strange woman was doing, but, without gratifying her curiosity, went back to the parlor.

She had barely entered it, when the

front door opened, and a heavy footstep announced the return of the Magic Doctor.

"At last!" cried Della, springing toward him as he came in. "I have been waiting for you these three hours."

"Indeed! It's a pity you had no company. You might have called our guest down, or visited her in her quarters," he suggested.

"Not I!" flashed Della. "I did not care to meet her."

"She is up there yet, is she?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"I have unmasked the woman."

"She is a spy?"

"She is not Philip Manx's child."

"You found that out? Did you?"

"That's what I went abroad to discover."

"Who gave you the information?"

"There is one in this city who knows all about Philip Manx. He had one child, a daughter, but this day I have had satisfactory proofs of her death."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, who is the woman up-stairs?"

"I am not certain of her identity," answered Dallas Doom. "But she is dangerous; that I know."

"I suspected that the moment I set eyes on her."

"She may be a spy of the Clew-Hawk?"

"If she is, then—"

"Then she is a creature known as Sarah Sharp."

"A female detective, and playing a dead hand against us!"

Dallas Doom looked at his daughter, but made no reply.

He saw her bosom heave with illy-suppressed excitement, and her hands shut in her lap.

"I might have silenced her while you were gone, and if I had known what you say you have discovered I would have done so."

"Let her go, for the nonce. She is in our hands—completely in the net which spares not. Sarah Sharp, or Susan Blunt—I care not which name she prefers martyrdom under—is as dead to the world as if four feet of earth hid her from the daisies."

"That is it!" cried Della, leaning forward, with intensely eager gaze. "Make me executioner, if you will."

"Trust me for that," was the response. "This creature is doomed. It was a bold play—I never saw anything like it—and it might have succeeded but for my visit to-day."

He took out his watch and glanced hurriedly at it.

"Bastien has not been back?"

"No."

"And you have had no visitors at all?"

Della did not hesitate.

She answered "No" in firm tones.

"Very well. I am sorry that I kept you waiting so long. But, I would like to surprise the woman up-stairs at once."

"That suits me exactly," and Della sprang up, flushing eagerly. "Come! We will do it. If a spy, she will be caught at work, perhaps. I long to hold her against a wall and throttle her!"

The doctor and his daughter left the parlor and advanced up-stairs. Their feet gave forth no noise, and they slipped down the corridor toward Susan Blunt's chamber.

Everything was still beyond the door.

Della leaned forward and listened, her face half turned toward her father's, which was calm and merciless.

"She is as quiet as a lamb," whispered the daughter. "She is playing 'possum to perfection."

Doctor Doom knocked, his hand sending an empty sound beyond the door, but the raps were not answered.

Della suddenly seized the handle of the door and gave it a turn.

It opened, and the doctor and his daughter stood on the threshold looking into an untenanted room!

"She is not here!" cried Della, the first of the pair to speak. "The bird has flown!"

"She was here when I went away."

"She was here when—I told Tres-sy that she might take a half-holiday."

"But look! You can see nothing of her. She is gone. Here is the untumbled bed. She has not disturbed anything."

The face of the girl grew ashen in its hues. She let her gaze wander round the little room, while her blood seemed to rush in a lava current through her veins.

"I might have killed her. I had it all to myself a while ago, and while she was yet here. What a fool I have been!"

"You did not hear her quit the house?"

Della shook her head.

"Did you sleep any this afternoon?"

The girl blushed guiltily, but smiled as she replied:

"For a little while in the parlor. I couldn't shake off the drowsiness; but, if she left the house by the front door she would have roused me, for you know the secret catch—"

"Ah, she understood that—my word for it!" interrupted Doctor Doom. "A woman like her misses nothing. But she is gone. Let it pass."

"She will go to her employers."

"What can she tell? What has she heard in this house?"

"One thing is to be done. That woman must be made helpless, so far as being our enemy is concerned. Who told you that she was not Susan Blunt?"

"Jozy."

"That old wretch? I thought he was not in the city."

"He came back some months ago. He convinced me that Susan Blunt is not Susan Manx, but a spy. Go down-stairs. I'll be there in a few moments."

Della turned toward the stairway, and Doctor Doom, walking down the corridor, opened the door of the little laboratory and locked himself in.

At precisely the same hour Kimball Keene, the Clew-Hawk, entered his room near Broadway, and was greeted by a woman who occupied a chair near the round table in the middle of the plainly-furnished apartment.

It was Sarah Sharp, and her sallow face broke into a faint smile as he appeared.

"I've been here only a little while," said she. "I thought you would drop in soon. If you had not come I would have left a note in the secret letter box. I've had a queer time of late."

"I knew you were not at home. Neither was Sparrow."

"No. I thought I would vanish for a time just to play a little hand of my own."

Kimball had stopped at the table, and with folded hands was waiting for her story.

"I had nice quarters, everything to one's hand, and the acoustics of the mansion were excellent—suited me to a dot."

Detective Keene looked at her, eager, but puzzled.

"Doctor Doom and his flashing daughter live in style. But it's worth one's life to become their guest."

"You've been there, have you?"

"Yes; and I think it paid me."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CLEW-HAWK'S TRAIL.

Kimball Keene, the Clew-Hawk, had just returned to his lodgings from a visit to Mulberry street, where he had been closeted with the superintendent.

This individual had said to him:

"One of our best spotters has been working up a case against the girl Oriel. From what you have already told me, I cannot believe her guilty of this murder. True, she was found in the laboratory behind the iron door the night of the crime, and under circumstances on their face decidedly against her, yet I am not ready to credit the story and theories which Cunning has just left with me. I have sent for you to say this, Kimball, and to add that you will work on, no matter whom you ferret out."

"If it be the girl Oriel, the report shall not be delayed a minute," was the answer. "I am in this fight to the finish, no matter if beauty's hands are found to be stained with the blood of the recluse chemist."

He had already laid before the superintendent the Brazilian bonds, so called,

which he and Oriel had taken from the secret cupboard in the hidden room, and they had been looked over with a great deal of interest.

As we have said, it was fresh from this interview that Kimball Keene appeared to Sarah Sharp in his own little room just off Broadway.

He was ready to listen to his right bower, and did so without breaking in upon her story.

Sarah gave a brief account of how she had managed to get into Doctor Doom's house by passing herself off as Susan Blunt, a widow, and the only child of Philip Manx, a one-time friend of the magic doctor's; how she had lived a short time in the house with eyes and ears open, and finally finished with an account of all she had seen and heard.

She had witnessed the interviews between Bastien Blue and the doctor, had seen the young man put under the strange spell of which Dallas Doom was master, had seen him while in that state hand his ring to Della and declare that he would make her his wife.

She had heard a good deal which passed between the doctor and his daughter, had witnessed the meeting between Della and Royal Flush, had seen the cool young man bleed the girl out of three hundred dollars by hinting at a secret which he pretended to hold against her, and had also visited several parts of the house, among them the little laboratory, which contained a good many odd-looking things, the uses of which she did not know.

"One thing is certain," said Sarah Sharp, in her peculiar tones. "Bastien Blue is in the hands of these people."

"Held there by more than the hypnotic powers of the demon doctor?"

"Yes."

"What is the other hand that secures him?"

"A secret of some kind. There is no doubt of this. Doctor Doom, and perhaps his child as well, is the possessor of a secret which affects Bastien's future, and he knows how to wield that club. The young man is as potter's clay in the doctor's hand when he exercises the mesmerism power. He is an easy subject. I never saw anything like it. He tried it on me."

"On you, Sarah?"

"Yes. It was upon the occasion of my first interview with him. I had to summon up all my powers to overcome the spell of those serpent eyes. I succeeded, but it was a dearly-won victory. I thank Heaven that I was not compelled to face him again and fight that battle over."

"You might have failed, eh?"

"I might have failed. You know that I can track people and foil the sharpest of them—that seems to be a gift of mine—but I was not made to cope with the hypnotist. Give me my match—aye, my superior in cunning—and I promise you that I will outwit him. But this man is all-powerful. I never saw any one like him. His daughter is a chip of the old block. She could have shot Royal Flush down in cold blood or have throttled him against the wall. She has the soft movements of a cat. I heard her at my door by accident. I knew she waited there for me with a dagger in her hand; I saw that same dagger after Royal's departure, and the miracle is that she didn't turn on him and thrust it into his back."

"So Mr. Flush won his play?" smiled the detective.

"Won it boldly. The little glass sphere brought her to terms."

"You saw it plainly, Sarah?"

"Yes; you must recollect one can look down into the parlor from the stairs by gazing over the transom, which just now is slightly ajar. It seemed to be filled with a reddish fluid, and to me it bubbled while he held it deftly between thumb and finger."

Half an hour later, under the lamps of New York, moved the slim figure of Sarah Sharp, the female ferret.

She kept in the shadows and hurried along, crossing the city, and at last running nimbly up three steps to open a door,

after which she ascended a stairway and unlocked another portal.

Tripping almost noiselessly across a room dimly lighted, she stopped beside a bed.

A child was sleeping there, and as Sarah stooped and imprinted a kiss on the little face, a smile wreathed the roseate lips and a pair of hands came up and two arms encircled her neck.

The trailer was at home, and the sleeping child was "Sparrow."

Sarah Sharp disrobed and dropped to sleep beside the little one, where we will leave her, to go back to the man she had left.

Kimball Keene did not remain long in his rooms after Sarah's departure.

Slipping from the house, he gained the street, and started off at a brisk pace.

It was nine o'clock.

Not long afterward he entered a cosy little gymnasium, where a number of athletic fellows were strengthening their muscles in various ways, and took a seat in a high chair against the wall to watch them.

His roving eye, always on the alert, singled out a young man who attracted a good deal of attention, and he began to watch his every movement.

"No wonder he broke down the iron door," said Detective Keene to himself. "That fellow has the powers of a Samson and the agility of an acrobat. Royal Flush must have his exercise, whether he robs a young girl or shoots a man on a roof. He will try his muscles on the horizontal bar or by lifting the weights. Perhaps he expects this experience to come handy some day. Well, well; it may."

Kimball Keene turned from the object of his regard for a moment, for Royal Flush had gone into the dressing-room, from which he presently emerged, dressed for the street.

For nearly two hours he had shown off before the man of clews, though without knowing it, and was ready to go home.

Detective Keene left the gymnasium before Royal, and waited for him in a convenient position on the street.

In a little while the object of his quest came out and walked briskly away.

In an instant he had a man at his heels, but at the same time so far behind him as not to excite his suspicions.

But Royal Flush did not look behind him; he did not dream that he was at that hour more than an ordinary individual going home after his usual exercise, and so he paced along, now and then nodding to some acquaintance, but stopping to chat with none.

All at once the young athlete stopped and uttered an exclamation as he caught sight of a figure on the street ahead.

"What—out at this hour?" he exclaimed. "I'll see what he is up to, but I won't let him know it."

He quickened his gait for half a block, which walk enabled him to come almost up with the person thus singled out and already recognized by Kimball Keene as Bastien Blue.

Royal now fell behind his master moderately, and followed him with the persistence of a wolf-hound, tracking Bastien down a dark street which began at the one they were on.

Kimball Keene drew off a little so as not to be noticed, and kept the pair in sight.

Bastien walked a little faster now, and turned at last into Fourteenth street, seeing which Royal Flush halted and looked surprised.

"He may be going to call on Oriel, but it is a late call," remarked Clew-Hawk Keene to himself. "The girl thinks more of him than the world knows, and—"

Bastien had looked up at the number of a certain house, and was already on the steps.

"It is Oriel's home. He has come to talk with her."

Royal Flush drew off and waited till the door had closed upon Bastien, who had been admitted, then he hastened forward and took a quick look at the door and the closed blinds.

Kimball Keene saw all this.

"It puzzles Mr. Flush," said he. "He cannot divine what brings Bastien Blue to Oriel's house at this time of night. Ho! here he comes back!"

It was too late to turn round and run from the man who was advancing toward him, even if he had cared to do so, therefore Clew-Hawk Keene simply whisked his hat rim over his brow and kept on.

They met in the shadow of a tree, and passed.

Royal had glanced at the detective, but had not recognized him, and his footsteps were out of sound when Keene looked after him.

He turned back with a smile, but crossed the street and again followed the athlete.

"That is not the way home, Mr. Flush," thought Kimball, as the young man turned into a certain street and increased his gait. "You will never see home in a thousand years if you walk always in that direction."

Royal Flush evidently thought not of going home.

He was approaching the house of the crime, going back to the scene of Raymond Rolfe's death, and with the shrewdest detective of Gotham in his wake.

Where was Policeman Clipper? Was the old man on the alert, and would he see the young acrobat when he entered the house.

There was a narrow alley alongside the house of death and mystery.

Royal Flush dodged into this and disappeared.

"It is to be an entrance through the rear door," ejaculated the detective. "I can beat him inside."

In another instant Kimball Keene was on the steps, and in another one inside.

He shut the door softly. He made his way to the staircase and ran up the soft steps.

Guessing that the laboratory would be the young man's objective point, he went straight to the upper corridor, and thence to the room from which Oriel had seen the strange woman emerge.

Closing the door, Kimball Keene drew up to it the only chair in the place, which he mounted at the door.

There, with the eagerness of the true detective, he stood and waited.

Presently footsteps came down the hall and stopped at the room of the iron door.

Was it Royal Flush?

Clew-Hawk Keene watched on, and saw the glimmer of a match beyond the broken door, and then the light revealed the form and face of a man.

In a moment the shape had resolved itself into Royal Flush, and the man of trails saw him light a lamp which stood on the dead man's work-bench.

For a moment Royal Flush stood in the light, as if showing off his figure to the hidden ferret, and then he went over to the little cupboard with the green door.

He stood there a little while, with his back turned to the detective, and when he turned away he held a tiny phial between thumb and finger.

He held it between him and the light, and Clew-Hawk Keene saw an expression of devilish triumph light up the depths of his eyes. In less than a second the phial was transferred to the night prowler's pocket, and Royal Flush extinguished the light, having gained his point.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHERE THE PHIAL WENT.

The Clew-Hawk of Gotham saw all this from his hiding place in the little room at the end of the corridor, and when Royal Flush had crept from the laboratory he went down the stairs and vanished.

Kimball Keene soon lost his footsteps, and in a little while he heard a door shut, which told him that the thief had left the scene of his theft.

Hugging to his bosom the phial he had abstracted, he hurried through the lights and shadows, and at last opened the door of a house some distance from Raymond Rolfe's late home and carefully locked himself in a little room.

There he lit a lamp and took a seat at a table.

He was on the second floor, and the room showed that it was a bedroom, though furnished with a desk and table.

He took the phial from its hiding place and again held it up between him and the light.

By and by he placed it in a secret niche in one of the walls, after which he regaled himself with a cigar, smoking like a man who has achieved a triumph at the expense of some personal courage. He smoked the cigar out and threw the stump into a spittoon, laughing aloud as he looked for a moment at the smoking but.

"It was a neat double play," said he. "I am just three hundred dollars ahead, besides getting possession of a little thing which will still further enrich me. There's nothing like it. Ha, ha!" And he got up and crossed the room with a smile on his face.

He was turning back toward the table, when he happened to look at the window.

He stopped short, and then, drawing a revolver, sprang to the window and threw up the sash.

"I thought so," cried he, firing at an object that vanished over the eave. "I have been watched, and by the same person whom I heard on the roof the other night. This is carrying the joke too far. I wonder if it could have been the detective? Tracking me, eh? It will be his last trail if that is his game."

Royal Flush stood for a minute at the open window, weapon in hand, and seemed to be waiting for the spy to come back; but at last, as the spy did not oblige him, he turned away and lowered the sash.

Even after this he remained at the window, with his senses on the alert, ready to meet the spy should he creep over the roof again to keep an eye on his movements.

But he listened in vain; there was no further noise on the sloping roof, and at length Royal lowered the light and threw himself upon the couch.

The clock struck twelve, and while the last stroke still sounded in the apartment, Royal Flush rose and slipped over to the lamp still burning a little.

"It's time," said he, audibly, hastily dressing. "I was to meet the old fellow at half-past twelve. He's a night owl, and will be ready for me."

A minute later he slipped from the house into the quiet street, going toward the river, and keeping in the shadows and near the buildings.

No one seemed to see him. His movements were stealthy and he looked cautiously around while he glided on with the steps of a fox.

He turned down the third corner and then entered another street as silent as the one just left; he walked half a mile over the quiet pavements and suddenly ran down a flight of four stone steps and brought up against a very common-place doorway.

There was instant response to his raps and the portal opened far enough to let him slip inside.

Royal Flush was greeted by an old woman, who was bent crone-like, but whose eyes burned with the fire of youth.

"Where is Jozy?" asked Royal. "You are not Jozy."

"Of course not, and I'm glad I am not Jozy," was the reply, in a squeak. "I wouldn't be Jozy for all this world—"

"Come, come; you needn't talk thus while time is precious. I am here to see Jozy Jebb."

"Don't be in a hurry."

Royal threw a glance toward a door on the other side of the room, and turned again upon the old woman.

"Some one's in there with Jozy, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then don't let me be seen."

"You need not be seen at all."

"Must he come out this way?"

"Not necessarily."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know."

Royal darted forward and clutched the old hag's wrist.

"Say, Marie, couldn't you let me get a look at him? Couldn't you give me a peep—just one?"

She shook her head.

"I'll make it interesting for you."

"But Jozy wouldn't like it."

"To perdition for the present with scruples! I must see who is in there!"

There was another shake of the head, as resolute as before, and Royal Flush looked at the old creature.

"I'll give you a ten," said he.

"No."

"I'll double it if it bankrupts me. Yes, I'll make it twenty—more money than you've seen in six months."

"That's a fact," grimaced the old woman. "I like money, though I've never got my share of it."

"Very well. Let me see who is in yon room with Jozy and I'll make you rich."

She seemed on the point of yielding, but all at once she drew back and walked away.

"You don't intend to refuse me?" cried Royal Flush, following her up. "Come, Marie, you can't afford to beat me."

"I can't, eh? You forget that I serve my brother to the death."

The man stopped and scowled heavily, but at the same time threw a fierce look at the door as if he would force it as fully as he had forced the iron portal of Raymond Rolfe's house.

Old Marie placed herself between him and the forbidden door, having pushed her cane-bottomed chair thither, and there she sat, as stolid as a carved image, whilst Royal was left to curse her inwardly, which he evidently did.

They had waited ten minutes, when there came a slight sound from the room beyond the door, and the young man, who faced the old hag, sprang up and started toward the door again.

"He's going!" cried he. "Jozy will lie to me. He's done that before. Let me look into that room—only for a second, Marie!"

"Not for an instant."

"You won't, eh? I've a mind to choke you."

"Try it."

She seemed to lose her hump as she uttered these words, and now she stood before Royal Flush, as straight as an arrow, with her skinny hands tightly clenched and her eyes fairly ablaze.

"Just you try it, young man, and I'll send you where the dogs won't even get to bark at you."

"You will?"

"Can't I?" almost laughed old Marie. "Can't I open up that little affair of the Cape diamonds? Can't I tell about the affair of the lost bonds—the Brazilian ones?"

Royal fell back and looked at the old thing like a baffled man, powerless to strike, and in another moment the door opened and Jozy came forth.

"Here he is," said Marie, with a sweep of her hand. "Here's Jozy. Now you two can talk."

She left the room as she finished, and Royal found himself alone with the man with the hook-billed nose whom Kimball Keene had talked with in the restaurant.

For half a second Royal Flush tried to read the old man's inmost thoughts while he bustled about the room, and when he spoke his name he stopped and came toward him.

"Did your caller leave?"

Jozy's eyes got a singular light.

"Come, you had a caller in there. I heard him. You have late visitors, I see."

"I am a man who must deal with late callers sometimes."

"Of course. He's gone, is he?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you'll talk to me."

"I remember my agreement. You are on time, I see."

"I always am."

"Did you fetch it?"

Old Jozy held out his hand, but Royal made no movement to produce anything.

"You were to have it, you remember?"

The young athlete looked at the old

face before him, seamed with more than human cunning, and suddenly broke out into a boisterous laugh.

"You're a cunning old dog, Jozy," he said. "You play with men's fortunes as if they were nine-pins. I know who was in there with you."

Jozy started.

"Fifty if you will whisper the name in my ear," he cried, leaning toward Royal. "I'll make it one hundred and I can't well spare a copper, either."

"You're playing double, old man."

"Me?" exclaimed Jozy, throwing up his hands in a spasm of holy horror.

"I say yes."

"I never do that."

"Come, you know better. The presence of the man in that room awhile ago is proof that you don't always stick to the truth. You are playing double, I say. And you don't get what I have until you play fair with me."

A sudden change came over the old man's face.

He became suppliant outwardly, though his wrinkled face belied his words.

"I don't like to have to give my patrons away," he said. "But the name of the man who was in there just now can't benefit you any. It was Cyrus Champ."

"Honest, Jozy?"

"As I live! You don't know him? I thought not. He is a gentleman who don't care to be seen here; but you won't give him away. I trust your honor that far."

Royal Flush eyed the old man with the glance of an eagle. He knew a good deal about him—knew that he would not hesitate to lie, deliberately lie, and for half a second he regarded him with accusing looks.

"Very well. I'll take your word for it," he replied. "Cyrus Champ, eh? All right, Jozy. Now, here it is."

As he finished he drew from his pocket a phial and set it on the table before the little old man.

The eyes deep set in Jozy's head sparkled like those of a basilisk's; his body suddenly bent forward and his long skeleton hand clutched the phial.

"This is it?" he laughed, holding it between him and the light. "I will be your servant till death for this. I won't forget you."

"See that you don't. Now pay me."

Old Jozy slipped across the room and came back with a little packet, which he placed on the table. It was done up in chamois skin, and Royal Flush seized it with delight.

A minute later he stood outside the house.

"The old villain! He lied deliberately," he grated. "I know who was in that room with him. Cyrus Champ forsooth! There is no such man in New York. It was the ferret—the shadow who is on the trail of the Rolfe mystery. Very well. I know what to do now. I know exactly what is to be done, and from this hour the doom of that clew-hawk is sealed. I've made a ten strike to-night."

He passed down the street, looking back but once ere he turned the first corner, and saw no one.

CHAPTER XIX.

SARAH SHARP ONCE MORE.

The vanishing of Sarah Sharp from his house puzzled Doctor Doom not a little.

If the woman had been there when he came back from his trip in the closed cab she might not have fared well at the hands of the Magic Doctor and his daughter, Della; but Sarah was beyond their reach with the information she had picked up while masquerading as Susan Blunt, and she was not likely to give the pair an opportunity to get even with her.

Della longed for a chance to pay the shrewd woman back, but she feared she would not get it, and the next day she came down-stairs dressed for the street.

Her father looked at her from the parlor and asked her where she was going.

"Never mind," was the reply. "Ask no questions till I return, and then you shall have all the answers you require."

Della passed from the house, walked to the nearest corner, and took a car.

She rode some blocks, when she alighted, and, turning into another street, crossed the threshold of a small private dining-room and threaded it to another room beyond, the door of which she closed behind her.

It was ten o'clock, and Della Doom, taking a chair, seemed to wait for some one.

"She must come shortly," said she, with some impatience. "She surely got my note, for Tressy says she delivered it, and— Here she comes now."

The door had opened, and there entered a woman whose face was veiled.

Della looked at her, noted her dress, and then tried to pierce the veil, but could not.

"You are here at last. You got my note?"

"I am here."

The speaker had taken a seat at the opposite side of the table, and Della was looking at her.

"You need not cover your face," she said. "You saw my advertisement, and subsequently got the letter?"

There was a nod, but not a word.

"I cannot deal with you until I know with whom I am dealing," continued Doctor Doom's child. "This is an important matter and I have a good deal at stake."

"You will pardon me if I refuse to lift my veil, but that I am the right person I will prove at once."

The veiled woman drew a glove and laid her hand on the table. A single ring with a turquoise set glittered on one of the fingers, and the eyes beneath the veil regarded Della with much intensity.

"You don't want to trust me yet, I see."

"I want to be sure," was the reply. "Besides, there is so very much at stake that I have a right to be very cautious."

"I admit that. I hope you got away safely the other night."

There was a quick start on Della's part, and she fell back in her chair and stared at the veiled one.

"What do you mean?"

"Ho! that ought to tell you that I am the right party. Come, you want to be sure of it. I don't blame you, I say. You had a narrow escape."

"I? The other night?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"You were seen to enter and emerge from the house."

"No? By whom?"

"By whom think you?"

"Not a watch?"

"Do you mean the policeman on the beat—Mr. Clipper?"

"The policeman for one."

"He didn't see you, but another did."

The face of Della Doom was quite colorless, and she did not seem to breathe as she leaned toward the watchful woman across the table.

"Won't you tell me? Why keep me in suspense?"

"You would be frightened if I did."

"Not I. See, my nerves are like steel ones. I am not to be frightened."

"Well, what if I were to say that you were seen by a detective?"

"Where was he?"

"He might have been in the house."

"At that time?"

"Why not? You must know, if you know anything, that that house has now a reputation."

"It has, indeed."

"You were seen, I say."

"By the detective?"

"You seem to refer to a certain one."

"Perhaps I do."

"Well, he saw you."

"But he did not—"

"I can't say as to that. He may not have recognized you. But I am sure he saw you at that house."

Della appeared to take a long breath and to collect her thoughts; she was trying to be calm, but her nerves were a little unstrung.

"Where were you?" she suddenly asked.

"Or, are you in the confidence of this man-hunter?"

There was a slight laugh underneath the black veil, and Della saw it rise and fall.

"Do you think I would be taken into the confidence of this man?" she asked.

"I don't know. I know that you answered my advertisement, and that I agreed to meet you here rather than at my own home."

"Perhaps you were right. This is a nice, quiet place. Your advertisement asked for some one who knew something about Hobart Strong."

"But that was not his real name, you know."

"I am aware of that," said Della. "You pretend to know something about him."

"Would I be here if I did not?"

"I trust not. Well, who was Hobart Strong?"

"Others called him Sydney Orne. He was the father of Miss Oriel Orne, who became the ward of the late Raymond Rolfe."

There was no reply by the doctor's daughter, but she seemed to be testing her companion's honesty with her dark eyes, which almost penetrated the somber veil.

"Miss Orne, I say, is the child of that man. He at one time was Rolfe's closest friend. He taught him a good deal about chemistry, showed him how to make the subtlest poisons known to toxicology! He dared not go by the name of Orne for reasons best known to himself and Raymond Rolfe, so he was known as Hobart Strong."

"You seem to know," said Della.

"I ought to know something about the man."

"Is he dead?"

"That's an odd question. Would Miss Oriel have become Raymond Rolfe's protégée if her father were not dead?"

"Stranger things than that have happened."

"But Sydney Orne is dead."

"You can prove this?"

"I can, but I cannot show you his grave. He died in Brazil. He lies entombed somewhere beside the Amazon. Coming back to the United States alone, Raymond Rolfe took the little girl under his protecting care and raised her as his own child."

"But he failed to make her his sole heiress."

"There was his half-brother, Bastien Blue. He had to give him a share."

"But Oriel Orne expected the lion's share, I am told."

"She thought she had a right to expect that. She will not make a wry face over what she did get."

"Now, I want you to give me some sort of proof that Hobart Strong is dead," said Della, pushing her chair closer to the table and bending over it. "I must have proof. It is not enough for you to say that he is dead. I want proof."

"What will you pay for proof?"

"I'll pay you well."

"That's not very definite," was the reply. "Give me some guarantee that I am dealing with an honest person. Give me a pledge, I say. You have a ring there."

Della's hand shrank suddenly from the table, but not too quick for the other.

"Let me have that ring in pledge, and to-morrow I'll restore it, with the proofs of Sydney Orne's death."

Della began to take off the ring, but all at once she stopped and let it alone.

"No, I can't do that. I am good enough with my word. I pledge you that I will play fair with you and pay you well for the proofs. I cannot part with the ring."

"Then we cannot bargain," was the reply, and the veiled woman rose and looked down upon Doctor Doom's daughter. "You will have to get your proofs elsewhere."

Della rose suddenly, but sat down again.

"You ask too much."

"Just as you like," was the quick answer, in a careless tone. "I have a right to make part of the bargain."

"So you have."

Shutting her lips hard, Della took off the ring and handed it to the strange woman.

"There, you have it. You will bring me proofs of this man's death, will you?"

"I will."

"And at that time restore the ring?"

"Yes; if you keep the appointment."

"Then let it be to-morrow at this hour

and in this same room. Remember that I am not a helpless woman. You seem to know me. I can't help that. You say I was watched the other night. Well, the human lynx saw nothing out of the way. Give me his name."

"You ought to know that, miss."

"Was it—"

Della seemed to hesitate to speak the name of the man of whom she was thinking, and the veiled one waited for her to do so. But she did not.

The veiled one moved toward the door and laid her hand upon the door knob.

Della, who had followed her movement, was seen to start, and all at once every vestige of color left her face. She sprang round the table, and with a sharp little cry threw up her hand.

"What is it, miss?" asked the unknown.

"Just one moment, please. I forgot something. I must have some proof of fair dealing from you. You have a ring on your hand, but you can show me your face."

The one who heard seemed to recoil against the door, and her hand was thrown up to defeat Della's mad intention.

Out went the white hand of the plotting girl; it closed on the black veil; there was a wrench and a tear, and the next instant the hidden face was brought to view.

"My God! I thought so!" cried Della, falling back, with a part of the veil in her hand. "You are Sarah Sharp, alias Susan Blunt, his right bower!"

She quivered for a second in the middle of the floor, with Sarah Sharp at the door, a curious smile on her thin, sallow face, and her eyes riveted upon Della.

"You thought so, did you?" said the female ferret. "You are very clever, girl."

These words were greeted with a mad exclamation, and something which seemed to leap from Della's pocket flashed in the sunlight that came in at the little window.

"You shall not betray me," she cried, as she sprang at Sarah Sharp with the quickness of a wildcat. "I will leave you here with your game only half played out."

But her descending arm was caught in mid-air by the quicker hand of Sarah Sharp, and Della's wrist was in a grip of steel.

She was held thus for a full minute, when Sarah Sharp pushed her back and released her, to open the door and vanish before the dagger could terminate the scene.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LIGHTING OF A LUCIFER.

Kimball Keene, the Clew-Hawk of New York, was old Jozy's visitor while Royal Flush waited in the adjoining room.

He left the den in Cherry street by an entrance which did not let Bastien Blue's factotum get a look at him, and while Royal talked with the old man he was walking from the place.

The detective had visited the den for a purpose, and was evidently pleased with the success of his call.

He did not go back to the little apartment near Broadway, but turned up in another house, where he was met by Sarah Sharp.

There was a look of victory in the deep-set eyes of the female ferret, and she smiled as Kimball took a seat at the table where she had just finished a lunch.

"This trail is getting interesting," said Sarah, lifting her eyes to the detective. "I have discovered one thing that interests me not a little. I don't think Raymond Rolfe was killed in the room where the body was found."

"You don't, eh?"

"I do not. I have just come from that house. I have been there alone for an hour, and there are little spots on the stairs, dark ones, which seem to tell a story not yet told to the newspapers. I have looked at them under the microscope."

"That enlarges them, of course. But are they spots of blood?"

"They are dark enough to be blood. They are found at irregular intervals on the carpet of the stairs."

"While there are none on the floor of the room where the body was found."

"That is true."

Sarah Sharp toyed for a moment with the fork, and then said:

"Would you care to go to the house with me?"

"Now?"

"Right away. I would like to show you something else."

"The blur on the wall?"

"No. I have seen that, too. But I think I can show you something you haven't seen before."

"I will go," replied Kimball. "If you have discovered a clew I would like to see it."

"I don't say that it is a clew. Your eyes are sharp, you may have seen it, too. But I want to show you, anyhow."

Sarah Sharp hurriedly prepared for the nocturnal jaunt, and in a few moments they were on their way to the house of the strange death.

"Let us avoid Clipper, the roundsman," said Sarah, in a whisper, as they turned the corner near the house. "He is as alert as an owl, and makes himself very prominent. The first thing we know he will arrest some innocent person who stops to look at the place, impelled by morbid curiosity."

Detective Keene made no reply, and watching their chance, when they were sure Roundsman Clipper was not near, they dodged into the narrow place between the Rolfe house and its neighbor, and passed to the rear.

"You came in this way, did you?" asked Keene.

Sarah nodded, and laid her hand on the handle of the door.

They entered the house, which was dark and silent, and took care that their footsteps gave out no sounds on the carpet.

"We need not illuminate the house," said Sarah. "You have your fairy lantern; that will be enough. Here we are in the hall. Now come and look first at the spots on the stairs."

She went toward the steps, and the Clew-Hawk followed.

"Here is the first one," she went on, pointing at a darkish spot near the edge of the stair-carpet. "You can see it with the naked eye. Now follow me up-stairs. Here is another, not quite so prominent, but seen all the same. This is the third one, and—"

"But hold. Did you ever think that these spots may have been made with some chemical? You know what he was?"

Sarah Sharp turned her lean face full upon the detective. They were close together.

"I know what he was not," said she. "He was not a fool chemist. He would not carry a leaky bottle up or down these steps. Here is my magnifier. Look close."

With the little light in one hand and the woman's glass in the other, Clew-Hawk Kimball bent over one of the dark spots and looked for some time.

Sarah Sharp, as rigid as a statue, watched him keenly, and even smiled at the thoroughness of his inspection.

"Well?"

"It looks like blood; but, whatever it is, it has eaten into the carpet."

"I didn't notice that," cried Sarah. "I thought I looked very closely, too."

She took light and glass, and looked for half a minute, when she rose and nodded.

"I give it up. It can't be blood."

"Chemicals, as I thought."

"Now for the other thing. That hasn't deceived me, I'm sure."

They passed up-stairs and reached the corridor leading to the room of the iron door.

Instead of turning toward it, Sarah Sharp led the detective toward the room at the other end of the hall—the one from which he had witnessed Royal Flush's theft of the little phial.

She closed the door behind them, and turned upon Kimball when he had entered.

There were a few old books on the shelves, and dust lay in profusion everywhere.

"You've been here?" said Sarah.

"Yes, I've seen this place before."

She went over to the shelves and moved the little light along them.

"Here is where a book was taken from the shelf and replaced," she went on. "You can see it."

"His work, perhaps."

"Do you mean Raymond Rolfe's or the murderer's?"

"Rolfe's."

"I don't think so. His hands were too large for this imprint. I found it during my last visit to this room. You see where the person who read the book rested a hand while reading."

Detective Keene drew near the shelf and looked. There was a space formed by the absence of several books, and sure enough, in the layer of dust there was to be seen the prints of three fingers.

Sarah Sharp said nothing till he spoke again.

"You have sharp eyes, Sarah."

"It is a good thing some one has, eh, Kimball," she said, a little sarcastically. "Now, here is the book that was taken out and read, or, at least, opened. You see where it was pulled from the shelf. It's an old book—'The Secrets of Toxicology.' Perhaps Raymond Rolfe looked at it more than once, but I don't think he tore out that leaf."

"Where is a leaf torn out?"

Sarah Sharp had taken the book from the shelf and opened it. She turned to the middle, and then thrust the volume toward the detective with a triumphant glitter in her eyes.

"Here is where the leaf was abstracted. You can see that it was done after the hand rested on the shelf. For see! here is the faint impress of fingers—just like you see them in the dust yonder."

Accustomed to track with this wonderful, all-seeing creature, Kimball Keene expressed no surprise, but inspected the book at the place indicated, and at last handed it back to Sarah.

"It looks that way. The finger-marks are small."

"As though a woman made them? Just so. The hand was gloved, for you cannot see the real flesh-marks anywhere. She came to this place to steal something from that book. It is an old volume. I doubt if another copy can be found in this city. Now, what did she want with that leaf? What secret did it hold in its keeping?"

"You ought to be almost able to answer that," said the Gotham Clew-Hawk. "You have done so well to-night."

"I can't do everything. You must take up the matter from here. I brought you thither to show you what I thought had escaped your eye."

"But you have an idea—a suspicion, haven't you?"

Sarah Sharp turned her head away for a moment.

"You know that Oriel came hither?"

"I found her here myself—in the laboratory the night we broke down the iron door."

"Just so. And if she knew the secrets of that chamber she must have known of these books."

"That is reasonable."

"What is more, she did know."

"You are very positive, Sarah."

"I have a right to be."

"I see. You have gone further in this matter than you let on. You have seen Oriel."

"I have not; but I have seen her gloves."

"You?"

A smile came to the sallow face and lingered there.

"You know that I am nothing if not a tracker of my fellow-being. You know to whom I owe this propensity. You know who made me a she falcon."

There was no response.

"I went after the quarry from this room. I have been to Oriel Orne's house. As I have told you, I have seen her gloves. There is one that betrays her."

"Not as the murderess?"

"I will not say. She was here; she stood where I stand, and while she took down this book and read it she rested her gloved hand on the shelf there."

Detective Keene looked at the shelf, and even leaned forward and again let the light fall upon the glove prints in the delicate dust.

"She carried off that leaf. She must have done so. I did not see her, but I know that she was here as well as if I stood at the door yonder while she read. Hark!"

Sarah Sharp turned toward the door as the last word fell from her lips and threw a hasty glance at Kimball Keene.

"We are not the only ones in the house. Put out the light. Quick! Now we are in the dark!"

They stood as silent as statues in the dense gloom which filled the library and waited.

Presently Kimball Keene heard a sound which had already saluted his companion's ears.

He knew that Sarah Sharp heard it, too, and he waited for further developments, standing in the dark, with his hand on the handle of the door.

A few seconds passed, and then footsteps were heard in the corridor. There was no mistaking the sounds, and the hand of the she falcon sought and found Kimball's wrist.

The pressure of the woman's hand said "Wait! We are on the eve of a victory."

At first the steps seemed to proceed toward the broken door of iron, and Kimball Keene thought of mounting the chair from which he had watched Royal Flush; but the following minute the steps came toward them.

Sarah Sharp pushed her companion toward the corner of the library, and there they remained in the darkness, scarcely breathing, and waiting for the denouement.

Half a minute had not elapsed, when the handle of the door turned, the portal opened, and some one seemed to stop on the threshold.

It was an exciting moment, and Kimball Keene was trying to guess the identity of the unseen person.

All at once there flashed up the light of a lucifer, which was struck on the jamb, and with it overhead the invader advanced.

The light fell upon the old books; it revealed to the wide-open eyes of Kimball Keene and Sarah Sharp a female figure, and as the invader turned her face toward them there was a wild cry, and Oriel Orne staggered back, dropping the burning match from her nerveless fingers.

"I would have wagered my head 'twas she," said Sarah Sharp. "What think you now, Kimball?"

CHAPTER XXI.

MAN, WOMAN OR DEMON?

"You here?" cried Oriel, the first of the trio to speak. "You are here to entrap me. I see it! Heavens! I am lost."

The hand of the detective had found her wrist and was holding it firmly, but at the same time with much gentleness. Sarah Sharp stood off with her merciless gaze riveted upon the white-faced girl.

The city Clew-Hawk, who had turned on the light of his little dark lantern, now released Oriel's wrist, and the young girl recoiled to the wall. She looked now at Sarah Sharp, and suddenly threw out her hand as she exclaimed:

"Who is this woman, Mr. Keene?"

"She is a friend of mine."

"Is she—"

Oriel did not finish the sentence, as if stopped by Sarah's glance, which seemed to send a chill to her bones.

"I am Sarah Sharp, child," put in the female detective, with a how o' gentleness in her tones. "We were not waiting here for you. We had no idea that you would come. You have been here before. You tore a leaf out of that book."

"I?" and Oriel's face quivered in the light.

"You stood yonder whilst you worked. If you will go up to the shelf you will see the prints of your fingers in the dust."

A singular curiosity seemed to lead the girl forward, and both Kimball Keene and Sarah Sharp saw her stop at the shelf.

"Do my fingers fit these marks?" she asked, looking over her shoulder at the pair. "Really, do you mean to say that I disturbed the dust here?"

"I say it," boldly answered Sarah. "Come, girl, the best thing you can do is to own up."

Oriel turned slowly upon the Clew-Hawk of Gotham. In her face there was a mute demand for protection, but Kimball Keene remained silent.

"You are going to let that woman have her way, I see. I am to be accused of murder by her and you intend to believe that I am guilty."

"But weren't you here?" cried Sarah Sharp, springing forward and laying her long thin hand upon Oriel's shoulder. "What can you say when one of your gloves bears dust marks at this very moment—I mean at your home and not the glove you wear this moment."

Oriel with a start looked at her gloved hand and her face suddenly flushed.

"You have played night prowler. You must have been the person Floralia heard in the house, and if Floralia had seen you your life wouldn't have been worth the snuffing of a candle."

"But," laughed Sarah, "your maid—the tigress Floralia as you call her—didn't see me at all."

"Come," broke in the detective, with a glance at Sarah, who subsided promptly. "I haven't accused you, but you have heard what has been said."

"By that woman? Yes."

"You came to this house and to this room for a purpose. Why didn't you go to the laboratory?"

"Because it wasn't there."

"The missing phial?"

"No, no," said the young girl, with a perceptible shudder. "You are the person to look for that."

Her eyes wandered to the shelves as she finished and with a profound effort she moved closer to them and halted there with a quick glance at Kimball Keene.

"Yes, I came to this house for a purpose," she went on. "Heaven forgive me, but I couldn't remain away another hour. Something had to be done, and I felt that I was the person to do it."

"To do what, Miss Oriel?"

"Take that woman away," cried Oriel, flashing a look at Sarah Sharp. "I see in her only the vulture that hunts down her own sex without mercy."

"I'll go, Kimball," put in Sarah Sharp, moving toward the door. "You shall be alone with her."

In another moment Detective Keene and Oriel were alone in the little room and the latter shut the door.

She stood in the middle of the chamber, with her face still pale and her hands clenched.

"I am to be hounded down by that woman, am I not? Is she your companion in this case?"

"I employ her sometimes."

"Yes, yes. And she is merciless. I did not think that I had left the marks of my hand on the shelf yonder."

"It was your hand, then?"

"It was mine."

"And the book?"

"I mutilated it, too."

"You tore out the leaf for—"

"For a purpose, but I swear to you, Mr. Keene, that I never shed a drop of his blood. Something had to be done. I saw that unless I helped him they would surely take him into custody."

"You don't mean Bastien Blue?"

Oriel's lips came together and welded into one as it seemed.

"Bastien? Yes, yes. You don't know what was done that night. You might have known if I had not come here."

She reached up and took the mutilated book from the shelf.

"I was here before the crime," she went on. "You remember that Sarah Sharp makes no specific charge. I was here three nights before the crime."

"Was it then that you mutilated the book?"

"It was then," answered the girl, in

low tones. "I feared the future. They had a fierce quarrel—one which in the heat of passion nearly left a dead man in the room bellow."

"Who quarrelled?"

"The half-brothers."

"Ah, you heard it?"

"More than that; I saw it all. It was my secret, for they did not know that I was in the house at the time. Bastien wanted some of the secrets of his mine of mystery. He wanted to know how human lives could be taken by the subtle poisons which he made in yonder laboratory. He was found in this room by Raymond Rolfe. He was found looking through these forbidden books. Perhaps he had discovered the secret which the missing leaf reveals—the secret of the most deadly poison of them all. I had looked through these books. I might have been terribly punished for my indiscretion, but I could not help it. I found that page. I robbed the book to keep Bastien from getting possession of the secret. It was the secret of the little globules which contained the red fluid. The phial which contained them was stolen from the table in the laboratory, you know."

"One drop of that fluid instilled into the blood will kill as surely as a drop of prussic acid. It was the poison of the old killers of Bengala."

"But Bastien might have seen the page."

"I know, I know," cried Oriel. "I took my chances and robbed the book."

"And carried off the leaf?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"Ask me where was it?" said Oriel. "I took it home. No one knew what I had done. I thought I would save him, for there was no telling to what the quarrel would lead. Those men, especially Raymond Rolfe, were desperate that night. Bastien was also hot headed. There were threats and curses. I took the leaf home, I say. I placed it under lock and key—"

"Well?"

"Bolts and bars did not hold it."

"You were robbed in turn?"

"I was robbed."

"By whom?"

"Ask that woman out there. If she saw my glove she was in my house."

"She saw that glove to-night."

"Does she say so? To-night? Is that the whole truth? If she was beyond my doors to-night why could she not have passed the portal before?"

"Shall I call her in?"

"Yes."

Oriel Orne was wonderfully calm.

Detective Keene opened the door and looked out. He saw no one in the hall. Sarah Sharp was not to be seen.

"Where is she?—in the laboratory?" asked Oriel, stepping into the corridor at the ferret's heels. "What has become of this she-vulture of yours, Mr. Keene?"

"Let us see. She must be in the house somewhere."

They advanced down the hall, went into the laboratory, the interior of which was revealed by Keene's lantern, and there they stopped, a little nonplussed.

"Not here," whispered Oriel. "She may know of the secret room."

They swung back the shelf and opened the door which led into the hidden chamber, but Sarah Sharp was not there.

"She may be below," remarked the detective. "Come, you want to see her and you shall if she is in the house."

Oriel eagerly followed Kimball Keene down the steps and together they entered the room of the tragedy.

"Here she is," exclaimed the young girl, starting back, but at the same time pointing to an inanimate object which lay on the carpet.

It was a female figure half drawn up, as if in the death agony, and her face pressed underneath an arm was not visible.

It was Sarah Sharp.

Kimball Keene stooped over the body and pulled the face into view.

Then he turned his lantern upon it and held the light close enough to enable him to identify her.

There was a wild, but far-away look in the woman's eyes, and Oriel suddenly touched Sarah's hand.

"Here is the fatal red stain," she cried, looking up at the detective. "It is the same death—the death of the red globule and the secret of the old book!"

Kimball Keene lifted the body of his female pard and bore it to the sofa against the wall.

Oriel remained a statue in the middle of the room and looked on, speechless, but terribly agitated.

"Is she dead?" she suddenly asked, going over to where Kimball bent above the form on the sofa.

"Not yet. For once the red death did not kill with its usual rapidity. She is breathing."

"Wait!" and Oriel vanished from the room.

Two minutes later she came back down the stairs in the hall and thrust a bottle of white fluid into Detective Keene's hands.

"Over her face, quick!" she cried.

The restorative acted promptly and in a little while Sarah Sharp's eyes were fastened upon Kimball's.

"Whom did you meet in this room?" asked the detective.

"I do not know."

"You were attacked?"

"Yes."

"In the dark?"

"It was not quite dark."

"But you ought to have seen—"

"I was a little too eager. I entered the room, opened the door cautiously and was against the wall in a moment."

"With some one at your throat?"

"Yes."

"Man or woman?"

Sarah Sharp shut her eyes and shook her head.

"It was neither," she said. "It was a demon."

A smile came to Oriel's face.

"That again exonerates him," she whispered. "Look at the finger marks in her throat. Say you not a woman made them?"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SUIT OF GREY TWEED.

The Clew-Hawk of Gotham stooped and held the light close to Sarah Sharp's face. There were marks on the darkish throat, and the detective looked at them a moment while the silent woman beside him stood and looked on.

When he rose, he was touched by the hand of Oriel Orne.

"You saw them?" she asked.

"They. There are marks on the throat, and they look like the prints of fingers."

Sarah Sharp had turned her gaze full upon the face of Oriel and for a second studied it sharply.

"Well, my young lady, did you confess?" she exclaimed.

"There," remonstrated the detective. "She told me a good deal. She has given me, I believe, a true history of the taking of the leaf, and let that suffice."

There was a little harshness in his tones and the female falcon subsided.

Sarah soon recovered, and left the room, halting in the hall, with a half-wild expression on her face.

She was about to seek the door, for the purpose of quitting the house, when steps were heard on the outside, and Roundsman Clipper protruded his rotundity into the corridor.

He drew back when his eyes met the group in the glare of the Clew-Hawk's lantern, but Kimball called him in.

Clipper evidently had something to say, for he looked first at the detective, and then at the two women.

"You've been here for some time, haven't you?"

"We came in some time ago," answered Keene. "Did you see any one quit the house?"

"That's what made me open the door," was the answer. "You see, I have been

on the alert ever since the night of the event, and I've kept a pretty keen watch on this house. About ten minutes ago I saw some one come out of the place, and—"

"Man or woman, Mr. Clipper?" broke in Sarah Sharp.

"I happened to be at the far end of the block, and I couldn't tell exactly which."

"But which sex did the figure most resemble?"

A curious smile came to Clipper's mouth a moment and seemed to linger there.

"To me, as far as I could see, it looked like a man in a cloak. I thought it would come my way, but it didn't. It whisked round the corner, and when I got there it wasn't in sight at all."

Keene's right bower looked triumphantly at her companion, and Kimball nodded.

"You must have seen the person," continued the policeman.

"I did not; neither did this young lady; but Sarah here encountered the prowler."

"Eh? Had a tussle with it?"

Sarah Sharp said yes.

"Then you ought to know something about it, unless the meeting was in the dark."

There was no reply, and Roundsman Clipper gave up trying to extract information from the reticent woman. Evidently Sarah had secrets of her own to keep, and intended keeping them, for without more ado she walked from the house, leaving the trio in the hall.

Oriel evinced a desire to return home, and Kimball Keene offered to accompany her in a cab, as he had done on a previous occasion, but she declined the offer and walked away.

"It's queer," said Roundsman Clipper, when Oriel had gone. "Did you find that young woman in the house?"

"We encountered her here."

"Just as you did once before, on the night of the strange death, you know?"

"Yes; but this time we didn't have to break in an iron door to discover her."

"No? She revealed herself this time, I suppose. In the laboratory?"

"In another room."

"What brought her here? Did she tell you, Mr. Keene?"

"It is not all a mystery."

"That's good. But to me it's devilish strange. I never saw her enter the house, though I've watched it well. By the way, Bastien Blue came here just before dark."

"To this house?"

"Yes. I saw him, and he didn't seem to care whether he was seen or not."

"How long did he remain?"

"Not very long, I guess. I went round the corner, and was gone about ten minutes. I did not see him come out, but suppose he did so while I was out of sight."

"How was he dressed?"

"He wore the gray tweed which he generally wears. It was the same suit he had on the night of the murder. I took particular notice of the suit, for that enabled me to identify him."

"And his face? You saw that, too?"

"As well as I could in the faint light. I suppose he was doing a little inspection on his own hook, and I didn't care to interrupt him, nor play spy on his movements."

Half an hour later Kimball Keene was in another part of the city, and Clipper was patrolling his now famous beat.

The Clew-Hawk walked past a well-to-do house of two stories, and seemed to take particular notice of the number over the front door.

He had walked half a block beyond the house, when he suddenly turned back, and, mounting the steps, rang the bell.

In a jiffy the door was unlocked on the inside and opened, and Bastien Blue stood in the hall looking into the Clew-Hawk's face.

He ushered the detective into the parlor where there was a warm fire, for the night was a bit chilly, and after inviting the detective to a chair, he drew one toward the table for himself.

"You couldn't have come at a more opportune time, Mr. Keene," said the young man. "I was just thinking about you, and

possibly I have something of importance to communicate."

"Then you discovered something at the H— street house this evening."

There was a quick start on the young man's part, and his face became a curious study.

"Pardon me, but I do not understand you," he replied. "At Raymond Rolfe's house to-night? I haven't set foot outside this house since three o'clock this afternoon."

Kimball Keene looked at Bastien, but not accusingly. After all, the eager Clipper might have been mistaken, and the gray tweed suit might have been darker than he suspected.

He glanced instinctively at Bastien's garments, and saw that they were dark and quite new.

"What makes you think that I was at the house to-day?" asked Bastien.

"Clipper thought he saw you come out of the place."

"Oh, Clipper, the fat pavement hawk?" laughed Bastien. "Well, for once, his eyes deceived him. I haven't been to the house since—well, not for three days."

"You have worn that suit all day, have you?"

"No; I put it on right away after dinner, and haven't changed it since. I was on the eve of going out to look for you, for, as I have said, I may have a bit of information for you."

"Bearing on the mystery?"

"Perhaps; but you shall be judge of that."

Bastien Blue crossed his legs a little nervously, and took a cigar from the box on the table.

"I talk better when I smoke, sometimes," he resumed. "I am a little nervous, as you may observe. Something very singular has happened to me. I am to marry Miss Della Doom."

The Clew-Hawk made no reply for an instant, but his eyes did not quit Bastien's face, which had turned quite white.

"It is true, and that is the most singular part of the affair. I never made love to the young lady, never courted her, and consequently a marriage with her was not thought of."

"Then, in the name of common-sense, how was it brought about?"

"That is one of the perplexing mysteries of the whole thing. She wears my ring now. See," and he put out his hand and showed the marks of a missing ring on one finger.

"Doctor Doom, her father, is a man of mystery, even as my half-brother was. I go to the house under a strange spell, and I come away weak, nerveless, and with my blood sluggish in all my veins. I cannot tell you what happens there."

"Why do you go?"

"That is what I cannot explain. Some unseen agency seems to drag me to the place, like one who is goaded to his doom by the mysterious. I appear to be under a spell of some kind."

The cigar went out while Bastien talked and he looked at the detective with a wild expression.

"Sometimes I feel that I am going mad—actually going insane," he went on, catching his breath hard. "I come away from that house in a maze, and get home—I don't know how."

"Who sees you there?"

"The doctor, generally; sometimes Miss Della."

"Has she made love to you?"

"Not to my knowledge. I was shown a paper which I had written and signed agreeing to wed her."

"When was it written?"

"They told me when and where. I wrote it and signed the same at Doctor Doom's house, so I am told, but I have no recollection of the acts. This is what I wanted to impart to you. It is beyond my comprehension. Sometimes I think I am being made the victim of a foul plot, and again I fear that I am mysteriously afflicted with a disease which fills me with hallucinations wholly inexplicable. Miss Oriel and I understand one another perfectly. I have seen her at home since the

crime. She does not charge me with having anything to do with the making of the will that was found with the Deposit Company. I was as startled as she over its provisions. Doctor Doom and his daughter congratulated me on my 'good luck'—I remember that—but I would throw the whole thing into the fire if I could solve the mystery of Raymond's death and the puzzle of my engagement to Miss Doom. But I must give it up."

"If, as you say, you cannot control your visits to Doctor Doom's, how can you be sure that you were not in the H— street house to-night?"

Bastien started sharply.

"There is something in that," he cried, paling. "If I cannot control my visits at one place, why not be apt to go to the other? My God! I did not think of that, while you think of everything, Mr. Keene. So Policeman Clipper says that the man who went to the house wore a tweed suit? You intimated as much when you questioned me awhile ago."

"Clipper is quite positive."

Bastien Blue passed his hand over his forehead in a perplexed way.

"You had a quarrel with your brother Raymond a short time before the murder?"

"Who told you that? We were alone in the house, and I thought that was a secret which would not be raked up."

"It is true, however?"

"It is true! I found Raymond in one of his tantrums; they usually followed a call by Doctor Doom, who was one of his most frequent visitors. I wanted to ask him a question about a poison, and he cut me off shortly. It irritated me, and we quarreled."

"And came to blows?"

"Not quite blows. I pushed him across the table and choked him to prevent being injured myself. I then left him lying there, perhaps unconscious; but not seriously injured, I'm sure."

"Did you ever get the information about the poison?"

"Yes," smiled Bastien. "I broke into his private library a short time after the murder and found it. It was a little mean in me, but I wanted to know. I can show you the page that tells about the poison."

"I'm afraid not, Bastien. It has been torn from the book."

"By whom, in God's name?"

"It was carried off by Miss Orne."

"By Oriel? I see! I see! You are weaving a net around that innocent girl! Look at me, Mr. Keene. I am the man who killed Raymond Rolfe!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CUNNING DOCTOR.

Bastien Blue's lips were ashen in hue and his hands had a nervous twitching.

He was laboring under tremendous excitement, which he tried hard to control, but the effort was a signal failure.

"Come, you don't mean that," said Kimball Keene.

"Don't I? And the speaker leaned forward and laid his right hand on the table emphatically. "I killed Raymond, I say. It was all on account of that foolish quarrel!"

"When did you kill him? Not that night?"

"No; not the night of the difficulty. You found him in the lower room, dead. You saw the splotch on the wall and the red stain in his hand. I can explain them."

The detective did not believe a word of this. It was all to shield Oriel, whom Bastien suspected was to be netted by the ferret; it was to save the girl whom he really loved.

The Gotham Clew-Hawk picked up his hat and walked toward the door.

"You don't believe me," cried Bastien, looking after him.

"Candidly, I do not."

"I will confess to the authorities."

"You don't intend to carry your deception that far, do you?"

"My deception? You must not involve Oriel in this dark crime. You shall not make the innocent pay for the deeds of the guilty. I will stand between her and that."

Clew-Hawk Keene saw that Bastien's voice quivered, and he left the door and came back to the table.

"Listen to me. Oriel is in no danger of falling into the meshes of my drag-net. I have not said that she is suspected. I do not believe that she had a hand in the crime, no more than you had."

"But—"

"There! you need not repeat your words. You will not go to the authorities. You will keep still. For the sake of the woman you love you will remain at home."

The young man sank back into the chair, from the depths of which he looked at Kimball Keene with gratitude.

"Will you undertake to save her?" he suddenly cried.

"I will save her; but, really, she is in no danger."

"That is good."

"You will take my advice. You will remain at home for, say, three days, will you?"

"If you say so. Do you mean that I am not to visit the Dooms?"

"Exactly."

"But the spell?"

"Fight it!" sententiously said the ferret. "Don't let it enmesh you beyond redemption. If you are sent for, stay where you are."

"I will."

"Remember! Three days in this house, no matter what happens!"

"I'll not forget."

Kimball Keene went out.

He seemed to smile to himself as he reached the sidewalk, and drew his hat over his brow.

Bastien Blue went back into the little room and tried to smoke.

"I'm under orders," he said aloud. "Three days in this house will be a month in prison. What will happen? They will look after me. To-morrow is to be the day of the wedding. I am to marry Della Doom to-morrow night. Can I fight it off? Can I break the spell of Doctor Doom's eyes? I must try. For your sake, Oriel, I will defy them both, and let them do their worst, no matter what that is."

He remained alone in the room for an hour, when he was joined by a man who let himself into the house and opened the door, softly stepping forward.

Bastien turned, and almost fell from the chair as he looked up into the face of Dallas Doom, the Magic Doctor.

A tremor swept over the young man's frame, and he paled beneath the strange, all-powerful glance of the magic man.

"All alone," said the doctor, with a laugh, as he came forward, and took a seat directly opposite Bastien. "I hardly expected this treat."

"I have been alone some time."

"Yearning for companionship, eh? Well, I'll chase away the blues for a little while. Cigars? Don't care if I do," and the long, white, effeminate hand of Dallas Doom took a cigar from the box on the table, and he leaned back, smoking complacently, while he regarded Bastien in a manner which made him shudder.

They talked for a little while on subjects entirely foreign to the all-pervading mystery of the H— street murder, when Bastien felt a strange feeling creeping over his senses.

He seemed to be falling gradually to sleep. It was a feeling which he could not shake off, try as he might, and did, and at last he made a feeble effort to rise from his chair, but fell back again, completely in the power of the fiend.

Doctor Doom watched his victim like a hawk.

He continued to smoke a while longer, and at length threw the stump of the "trinidad" into the cuspidor.

He bent forward and made a few mesmerizing passes before Bastien's face, and a quivering of the thin lips was the result.

Bastien was in the hypnotist's power, and Doctor Doom seemed to gloat over his speedy triumph.

"You are going out with me," said the doctor.

"Why with you?"

"You shall see. Go and get your overcoat."

Bastien moved to obey, but the doctor caught his arm.

"I'll go with you," said he.

They passed up-stairs together, and Bastien, watched by the serpent, donned his fur-lined coat and turned to him with a smile. His eyes were wide open, and he seemed to have perfect control of himself, but at the same time he was under the will of a mind stronger than his own.

Bastien descended the steps with his persecutor at his side, and they left the house together.

At the nearest corner was a cab, which Doctor Doom hailed with a look of pleasure, and in another moment both were on the inside, sitting side by side, the gloved hand of the Magic Doctor clutching Bastien's wrist.

The drive was not a very lengthy one, a number of turns were made, and the cab stopped at last in front of Doctor Doom's house.

The young man was helped from the vehicle and escorted into the mansion.

He was walked into the sumptuous parlor, and Doctor Doom pulled the tasseled cord which hung over the table, and waited for some one to come in.

Presently there were steps on the stair and Tressy, the maid, entered.

"Where's Della?"

"She went out half an hour ago."

"I told her—"

Doctor Doom glanced at his victim, who had moved in the arm-chair, and fixed his gaze upon him.

"I must wait, then. Tressy, you can go out, too."

The girl bowed, and ran up-stairs.

Once more the mesmerizer and his victim were left alone.

Dallas Doom seemed to take delight in the success of his powers. He even leaned forward and smoothed Bastien's hand, glancing at the marks left by the ring which he had handed over to Della.

"In a few minutes we will have him fully in our power, and the eight hundred thousand will be ours. There's nothing like perseverance. I'm deuced glad that that she hawk isn't in the house at this time. What a fool I was to believe for a moment that she was Philip Manx's child. Old Jozy could have settled that before he did if I had only gone to him. But I can render her powerless. I can render all her work void, and she need give me no uneasiness. Ha, there's nothing like sticking to a game to the very end of it."

He never left the chair while he waited for the return of his daughter.

Now and then he glanced at the handsome clock which ticked away on the marble mantel, but for the most part he regarded the man in his grip.

"What keeps the girl?" he growled. "Tressy evidently did not know where she went, for she volunteered no information. It is getting late, and this man must be home at twelve."

Just then the clock struck eleven, sending its silvery tones throughout the room, and Doctor Doom looked daggers at the door.

At last it opened, and his face flushed as he looked at his daughter.

Della Doom stood on the threshold, gazing at Bastien in the chair, and scarcely seeing her father.

Her face was colorless, and her dress was torn.

There was a long red mark on one of her cheeks, and her eyes had a wild look.

She came forward slowly; her gaze at last turned full upon her father and her figure was in a strange quiver.

"What is it?" asked the astonished doctor, looking up.

"When did he come?"

"Oh, he's been waiting for you an hour."

"For me?"

"Yes. Where have you been?"

There was a quick start, and a hasty look at the door.

"Tressy said you had gone out, but she said no more."

Della caught a chair and pulled it close to the table. She almost fell into it as

she uttered a slight cry, trembling like a leaf despite her usual nerve.

"What injured your face. You have met with an accident."

"My face? It is scratched, is it? I have had an adventure. I have been over to that accursed house. Did you send me thither?"

"I?" exclaimed Dallas Doom.

"Yes; I know what you can do when you exert your powers. If you sent me thither you must have known who was there."

Doctor Doom seemed to have forgotten all about Bastien.

He caught Della's wrist and sank his icy fingers into it.

"Who was there. Tell me."

The girl took a long breath and collected her thoughts before she replied.

"I went there, I hardly know why. It was the second time to-night."

"Not the second time?"

"Yes. But, never mind about the first one. Perhaps I went back to see what had happened after the first visit. I found the house tenanted."

"By whom?"

"By the man who blackmailed me out of three hundred dollars."

This was news for Doctor Doom.

"The man who blackmailed you?" he cried. "You never told me about that. Who blackmailed you?"

"That man's servant. His right bower, Royal Flush."

"That young sport?" laughed Dallas Doom. "He blackmailed you, did he? And you didn't resist?"

"I couldn't. I dared not. He had everything his own way that time. I was in his power. It was when Sarah Sharp, as you call her now, was in the house."

"You saw him in the H— street house to-night, did you?"

"Yes."

"You came upon him suddenly, I suppose?"

"I did. Oh, it was very startling. He was in the laboratory. I went up there, you know. There he was, bending over the black bench to the right of the door."

"What was he doing?"

"He was taking some little phials from the shelves and looking at them."

"Well?"

"He heard me. I tried to get away, but in a moment I was in his grip. Desperate I was then, and I struggled with all my might. I seemed to have superhuman powers. I seized one of the little phials; I dashed it into his face, and it broke there. He fell from me like a person struck with a sledge. He reeled away and dropped dead—yes, dead, I believe—under the round table in the chamber."

"It was your only way," coolly said Doctor Doom.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BASTIEN ROBS THE EAGLE'S NEST.

"What else could I have done? His grip was a grip of iron and I had to release myself in some manner."

"I say you did right," was the Magic Doctor's reply. "So he was in the laboratory alone?"

"Alone. For a moment I stood spell-bound, and when he turned upon me I thought it was my last moment. I know not what was in the phial, but whatever it was it was a terrible death agent."

Dallas Doom was silent for a moment.

"You did not look at the face, did you?"

"No, no! I got out of the horrid house at once and came home."

Della looked at her father a minute and then turned upon Bastien Blue in the chair.

"Did he come hither of his own volition?" asked she.

"He is here, at any rate. Tressy I have sent away. She will not be back till after midnight."

Della went over to Bastien and passed her hand over his white brow.

"You don't intend that it shall take place to-night, do you?"

"Why not?"

"I was not prepared for it. The cere-

mony was not to have been performed till to-morrow night."

"A few hours will make no difference, and, besides, may save the stakes."

"Then it shall be as you say. Shall we wait till Tressy returns?"

"No. I will see that it is legally done, and there shall be signatures to still further substantiate it. I have arranged for a minister. He will be here in a few minutes. In fact, he is in waiting at this moment."

"In the house?"

"No, but within call. Watch him, Della. You will be a bride within the hour."

Doctor Doom threw a cloak across his shoulders and left the parlor.

"Don't remain away long. He may come out of the spell, you know."

"Not much danger of that, I guess. Keep watch over him and if he stirs—if he shows any signs of coming out of it—throw this across his face."

A dark handkerchief fell upon the table at the young girl's hand and she picked it up.

The Magic Doctor walked into the hall and Della heard the door close upon him.

She was alone with Bastien Blue, the victim of the Dooms. She looked at him a little while, and then, moving across the carpet, got a look at herself in the long mirror.

She showed some signs of her adventure in the house on H— street.

Her face was very white and the scratch across it showed red and startling.

Then, her sleeve was ripped and her bracelet broken and altogether she did not look much like a young lady on the eve of her nuptials.

Della did not remain long before the mirror.

She came away thinking for the moment more of her looks than of the man in the chair, and shutting the door and locking it, she ran up the stairs and bolted into her dressing-room.

It did not take her long with her deft fingers to rearrange her attire, and in a little while she came tripping down the broad steps with a smile on her face.

"What if he is gone?" passed swiftly through her mind. "What if Bastien is not in the parlor? But, pshaw! He couldn't get out, for I locked the door."

She did not open the portal without some misgivings. She hastened to look beyond it, when all at once she seemed to petrify in the light, for Bastien Blue's chair was empty.

Della Doom uttered a sharp cry at this and in another second was at the table.

"Gone!" she gasped. "Gone and all because of my folly. I was told to watch him every moment, and here I've let him escape."

She sank into a cushioned chair entirely unnerved and looked at her white scared reflection in the mirror.

Several seconds passed before she came to.

"He didn't go through yon door," she exclaimed. "I had to unlock it to get in here. He must have gone out through the rear of the house. I may find him and bring him back."

She started up at this and sprang across the parlor, opening a door near the piano and passing into another room.

Nothing was seen of Bastien.

"Heavens! How can I meet him when he comes back? What can I say in support of my folly? I dare not meet him."

She went on into another room and found herself in the kitchen. A door stood open and a whiff of night air struck her face.

"This is the way he went out. He is really gone and we have lost him."

She was about to turn back when a noise fell upon her ears and she saw something dark rise from the ground before her.

Della uttered a cry and stopped like a trained setter.

Gradually the something took shape between her and the lights of another house and she saw the figure of a man.

"'Tis he—'tis Bastien Blue!" she said to herself. "I have found our prey."

In another instant he came toward her and Della shrank back as if dreading the meeting she had just sought with fiendish eagerness.

They stood face to face, Bastien Blue hatless, in the shifting light, and she like a statue in the little room.

He was out of the spell, but still somewhat dazed; she could see that.

"Ah! I have found you, have I? Come back into the house. I want the paper and the ring."

Della heard every word, but did not stir.

She was dragged back into the parlor with a long hand at her wrist and in the bright light which prevailed there she was almost thrown into a chair.

Bastien Blue stood over her, his eyes glittering like a basilisk's, and his body slightly bent forward.

"Where are they? Ah! You have the ring now on your finger."

"But you put it there?"

"Under what infernal spell?" cried he. "I want it—now, now!"

She did not lift her hand nor make a move to remove the ring.

"Come, I'll tear it from your finger," he cried. "Take it off, girl, or, by Heaven, I'll take it by force."

Della thought of something at that moment in her pocket and wondered if she could not fight him off with it. She had stood at Sarah Sharp's door with that same needle-pointed dagger in her hand, and now she could reach it in an instant.

Suddenly Bastien pounced upon the hand before Della could withdraw it and wrenched off the ring.

"Now for the papers—the ones I signed under the spell. Quick! I don't care to face that scoundrel hypnotist when he comes back. What, you don't know where they are, eh? Open yon desk."

Della looked toward her father's private desk, but shook her head.

"Don't tell me that you can't!" cried Bastien. "You two people have everything in common in this house. You have no secrets between you. Come, the papers in a moment!"

He pulled her from the chair and her hand dropped into her pocket, but he saw the movement and anticipated it.

"You sha'n't sting me," said he. "You have a dagger down there, but you sha'n't cut Bastien Blue. The desk, please. You carry the key where you do the dagger."

She went toward the desk, gripped by his hand, which seemed to sink to the bone, and he stood her up there with an exclamation of victory.

"Open it!"

She dared not refuse nor plead inability to do so any longer. He would not listen, and well she knew it.

So she drew a bunch of keys from her pocket, but, as if to gain time, got hold of the wrong ones, one after another.

Bastien saw this.

A smile came to his face at this, and he broke into a little laugh.

"Trying to gain a little time, I see. I can't wait. Give me the bunch."

But just then Della apparently found what she had been looking for, for she turned a key in the lock and with the other hand lifted the lid.

"Now, get the papers. Don't deceive me another second."

Her hand moved toward a certain pigeon hole in the desk, and pulled forth some papers neatly tied with a scarlet cord.

Bastien snatched them from her hand the moment she drew them forth.

His knife cut the cord and he leaned toward the light as he ran over what he held in his hand.

"This is the main one," said he, clutching a certain paper. "And what is this? Heavens! Did I do that, too?"

There was no reply, but the eyes of Della Doom watched him like a hawk's and she breathed hard while she looked.

"You can tell your father that I've got the documents when he comes home,"

he remarked, looking up at her. "I guess I've won them. Now you can have the house to yourself."

He crammed the papers into an inner pocket and tramped across the carpet with the air of a victor.

Della remained at the plundered desk.

Her face was ghastly and her whole form quivered.

At the open door Bastien Blue stopped and looked at her.

"It was a well played game, and, but for your father's infernal hypnotism, it would have had no hopes of success. The end is not yet."

"You are right. The end is not yet. This victory will cost you dear. It ruins you!"

His reply was a laugh, and in another second he had crossed the threshold and passed from the room with the figure at the desk to keep him company in mind far from the mansion.

Bastien Blue cleared the premises as soon as possible. He was eager to get away from the scene of his exciting adventure and anxious to find himself once more in his own house.

Della Doom left the desk open and tottered across the room to the chair.

She looked unnerved and speechless.

"What will he say? He will come back with the minister, but the man I was to have guarded is gone. Not only this, but he has carried off the papers that made him ours."

Well might she wait frightened for footsteps in the hall; well might she look scared at the door and wonder when her father would come.

By and by a key turned in the outer lock and she heard some one come in.

Della, who had not moved in thirty minutes, slowly turned her head and shut her eyes.

"Where is our prisoner, child?"

She heard and sprang up. Her father stood before her alone.

"I failed to get the man I wanted, but he will be at our service any time after to-night."

Della's glance travelled toward the desk and the doctor's eyes followed it.

"What has happened?" he cried.

"He has robbed us. See, he tore the ring from my hand. I could not help it. You shall have the whole story—"

"Never mind. I am satisfied that you did your best to keep the gilded bird in the cage. He is ours still. Whatever he did to-night, there is no escape for him. That man is doomed!"

Della falls back into the chair with a grateful sigh.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WITNESS OF THE DEAD HAND.

The Clew-Hawk was not done with Royal Flush. He had not forgotten the visit to Raymond Rolfe's house on the night of the crime and how cool the young man was through that ordeal.

He recalled, too, the blows Flush had rained upon the iron door with the strength of a Samson while Bastien stood near, a little nervous, but trying all the while to keep cool.

The finding of Royal at the gymnasium, after the crime, the tracking of him to the house on H— street, the theft of the phial and the subsequent giving of it to old Jozy, were the links of a chain which the crime-tracer wanted to follow up.

It was the morning after the events we have just witnessed that the Clew-Hawk might have been seen in a small apartment which looked very like a chemist's shop.

It was not so large as the room of the iron door, nor were the phials and chemical apparatus arranged with such neatness as there, but everything showed that the owner sometimes delved into the mysteries of science for something more than mere pastime.

The morning was well advanced, but the detective was alone.

He had looked over the shelves and was in the act of opening a drawer when a door behind him opened and a singular looking person entered.

"Making yourself at home, I see?" grimaced the man who came in—an old man, a little bent and wrinkled.

Kimball looked at him and noted the fire that seemed to flash up in his eyes.

"That's right. I thought of you almost before I went to the door. You promised, you remember, to send up a message in case I might be busy—a message which no one but I should understand. I started a little at the tone of it and here I am."

Keene took a seat, which was a revolving chair, and turned so as to face the old man.

"What do you want to know this time? You remember I wasn't of very much service to you the last time. The defense beat you in spite of what I knew about blood. Well, the best of us miss it now and then."

Kimball, making no reply, took from his inner pocket a flat package, which he proceeded to open in the old man's presence. This done, he laid upon the table a piece of heavy wall paper larger than one's hand and quite dark in hue.

"I see. This must have come from the house on H— street," smiled the old chemist.

"You are right. It came from the wall near which Raymond Rolfe was found dead. You will see that an attempt has been made to obliterate the original stain. A blur was the result, and this, in turn, has been tampered with."

The old man went to work and for some minutes not a sound was heard in the little shop while he tried several chemicals on the splotch.

At last he looked up.

"It seems to baffle me. Raymond Rolfe, I happen to know, had made great and startling progress in chemistry. He was ahead of Doctor Doom in this science."

"Oh, you know the doctor, then?"

"Why shouldn't I? He was my pupil, once."

"Indeed!"

The detective manifested a little surprise, yet, when he came to think of it, there was not much occasion for it.

"The strangest part of it all is that Doom deems me dead. I vanished suddenly years ago—went away just after an exciting interview with him. I remained away until six months ago, when fate brought me back to New York, and here I would have remained buried but for your keenness."

"I had to find you," observed the ferret. "I could not get along without you."

"Perhaps not."

The old chemist went back to the wall paper; he bent over it with a powerful glass after spraying the splotch with some fluid, and Keene waited in silence.

"I see the prints of fingers," asserted the old man at last.

"They have been seen before, but not lately."

"I see them plainly, now. Here is the little finger, quite distinct. A hand was placed against this particular spot on the wall. It was before the thing was tampered with."

"You are sure it was before?"

"Quite sure. What is strange, the prints seem to indicate a woman's fingers. How far from the floor was this stain on the wall?"

"About four feet."

"The man lying on the floor in the death struggle could not have reached it?"

"He could not."

"But some one stepping over him could have laid his hand there?"

"Certainly."

"Take the glass, Keene. Take it and take my place a moment."

The Clew-Hawk took the glass and bent over the paper on the table.

He said nothing as his eyes fell upon the unmistakable outlines of a hand on the surface, despite the tampering with the paper. The palm was not there, but the fingers were, and he saw that they were small and delicately formed.

"I see," said he, drawing back. "You are right. That splotch was made by a human hand."

A nod on the old man's part told that he heard the detective, at whom he looked with intense eagerness.

"I read everything I could get that bore upon the crime in the old house," said he. "I remember that the dead man's hand was bloody."

"And cut?"

"Yes, and cut."

"I can't say that it was blood, at least not all of it."

"See here, Kimball, if you only had the hand itself to show me! If you had stooped to a little theft—the dead would have been none the wiser for it, you know—"

"You mean that you would like to examine the dead man's hand?"

"That's it, exactly."

Keene threw back his overcoat, which he had kept on all the time, and displayed the top of a package above the inside pocket.

"It is singular that I did not think of that before to-day," said he. "You know, or may have read, that the body is still unburied, pending investigation. It is at the Morgue, guarded by the authorities, who have had it embalmed."

"I did not know that. But you have the hand?"

The package was forthcoming, and as Kimball Keene bent over the table the old chemist looked at the sealed packet with staring eyes.

An odor of chemicals pervaded the room more than ever as the several wrappings were removed, and at last a human hand was laid, palm downward, on the oil-cloth.

"So, that is it! I haven't seen that hand for years—not since Raymond Rolfe came back from Brazil. He used to drop in upon me before he went to the tropics, for even then he evinced a liking for toxicology. That is his hand. Let me prove it."

The little man opened a drawer near at hand and took out a number of charts.

He ran over them and suddenly threw beside the hand the drawing of a human hand, perfect in the minutest details.

It was Raymond Rolfe's hand to perfection, and the detective nodded when he saw it.

"Turn it over," said he.

This was done and the old chemist started when he saw the deep crimson stain in the palm.

"Death didn't obliterate it, I see," he observed. "It must have been plainer at one time than it is now."

"It was."

"Here are the cuts the newspapers spoke of. Look like glass wounds."

"There were bits of glass on the floor. They looked as though they belonged to a delicate globe of glass, which might have been broken in the deceased's hand."

"Say you so?" cried the old fellow. "This is the death agent. There was no stab, no other abrasion of the skin? The man was killed quickly and as surely as if by the electric current. Now, there are few poisons which kill that way. He must have known of them, for he was an adept in toxicology. No one thinks that he deliberately took his own life. You don't believe that, Kimball?"

The Clew-Hawk shook his head.

"Of course not. But the terrible agent might have been in his possession."

"Something of this kind, think you?"

There rolled across the table, slipping from the detective's hand, a little glass sphere, the one which Oriel had given him.

The chemist stopped it gently with his finger and held it up between finger and thumb.

"It was this," cried he, for the first time betraying excitement. "I don't ask where you got this, Kimball. You have brought me the murderer's weapon."

"I trust I have."

"Have you another like it in case we break this one?"

"That is all I have."

The chemist took the dead hand and laid it, palm downward, again.

Then poising the globe over it a moment, he tapped it with a little steel rod, gently breaking it, and letting a few drops of its red fluid fall upon the skin.

In an instant the fluid seemed to penetrate beneath the surface and a crimson tinge overspread the hand.

The New York Clew-Hawk watched these proceedings with bated breath and did not speak.

"It is as I thought. The Red Death struck him. He must have known of its existence, for he told me once that he owned a copy of the 'Secrets of Toxicology,' a work which you might not be able to pick up in ten years' travel. It's pretty, isn't it, Kimball? See how the redness seems to travel beneath the cuticle like a worm. You can see it wind round the depleted veins and almost sparkle where the blood used to be."

The old man was becoming enthusiastic.

"Anything more, Kimball?" he asked, looking suspiciously at the detective's pockets.

"Nothing more. You have exhausted my treasury to-night," was the reply.

The alchemist went back to the globe and its strange work.

"I am the chemist, you the ferret," he said. "I produce results, you forge the chain."

There was no reply.

In another instant the wrinkled hand of the old man laid the bit of wall paper alongside the ghastly sight on the table.

"You are the tracker, I say—the merciless bloodhound of the law. You will have to find the owner of this other hand," and his finger touched the splotch on the paper.

"From that hand to this one you can build a bridge which your cunning will allow you to cross in pursuit of the guilty."

"You have already told me that the finger marks there show up like a woman's."

"I say that again."

"Then, do you think that a woman killed Raymond?"

"That is for you to determine with these things before you—silent witnesses of the deed of the night of the fourth."

"What do you think?"

Keene leaned back in his chair and waited for a reply. The old man shut his eyes and remained silent a little while.

"I wasn't there, you know," said he, at last. "But, if the woman who made that mark on the wall didn't kill him with the crimson death, who did? That is for you. Go out there on the trail and answer that question."

The detective rose and looked down at the weazened face near the table.

"Keep those things until I call for them," said he, pointing to the hand and globe of glass. "I will come for them when I have netted my victim. You have confirmed a terrible suspicion. You have put me on my feet once more and have set them on the blood trail of H— street."

"But beware, Kimball; The person who killed with the little globe may be dangerous still. The prettiest vipers are the deadliest. I have seen the golden bee kill the flower with her sting. That woman, wherever you find her, will be terribly armed. So look out."

There was a fearless gleam in the detective's eye and he stepped back, followed by the old alchemist to the door.

"Doctor Doom might tell you something about this agent, but you won't go to him, eh? All right. Look out for the hand that left its red autograph on the wall."

Kimball Keene was on the street again and as he rounded the first corner he heard a quick footstep behind him.

"Keep straight on and turn only when I do," said a voice as a figure passed him. "Death is on your track, even now."

The Clew-Hawk did not give the woman a second look; he knew that Sarah Sharp had spoken.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARKED FOR LIFE.

The city ferret followed Sarah Sharp some distance before she halted; then she turned suddenly, and after passing through a street which seemed to end the trail, she stopped and entered a house.

"You heard me?" said Sarah, as they entered. "I told you that you were in the shadow of death."

"Of course I heard you," was the reply. "I did not expect to see you on the street. You knew where I was?"

The woman nodded.

"I thought you were with old Marius. You told me, you remember, that you intended to consult him. Well, you have kept out of the snare by doing so."

"How out of the snare?"

Sarah Sharp spoke rapidly for five minutes. There was no excitement in her face, and her voice was calm.

"Royal Flush is marked for life," said she, as she concluded. "The young man has met with an adventure, and in the house on H— street. He went thither for a purpose, and he encountered some one there. Would you like to see him?"

"Where is he?"

"At home. He managed to get back, more dead than alive, and I think is ready to listen to you."

"Whom did he meet in the old house?"

"Let him tell you that," observed Sarah, with a smile. "He came out of the tussle the worse for the wear, but he will talk, I am sure of that."

"Come, then," answered the detective, but the hand of the female detective touched the ferret's arm.

"In a moment. Let me go out and see if the spy is still at your heels."

She rose and left the room, while Keene, with a singular expression on his face, leaned back in his chair and waited.

Sarah reached the sidewalk and cast sharp glances up and down.

Ever on the alert, she was ready to single out any enemy, and for some little time she stood near the doorway, looking at every one in sight.

Across the street lounged a man who did not appear to have anything particular to do. He did not send suspicious looks toward the woman, but, all the same, she knew that he was on guard.

She came back to Kimball smilingly.

"I thought so," said she, as she bent over the little table where he sat. "The wolf is after the fox. I have just seen him."

"Out there, eh?"

"Yes."

The detective rose and stepped toward the door, but the hand of Sarah Sharp restrained him.

"Not yet. There is no hurry. Royal Flush will wait for us. Sit down again."

The Clew-Hawk dropped back into the chair and looked at her.

"You know the watcher, do you?"

"Of course," was the reply. "I know him for one of the cleverest rascals in this city. You will know him, too, despite his disguise."

"Oh, he is disguised, then?"

"Do you think a man would track Kimball Keene in his own garb?" she exclaimed. "What a fool he would be. I would sooner trail a rattler in slippers."

Kimball laughed at her words and waited on.

"You want to see him. I know you do," said Sarah, presently. "I never saw you so restless before. Come, then. If he is out there you shall have a look at him."

They quitted the little place together, and Sarah guiding the detective up a flight of narrow stairs, they pushed through a room filled with trumpery of all kinds, to a front window.

"Look!" she went on, pointing from the window, and designating a man on the opposite side of the street. "There is your shadower!"

Keene looked at him a moment, and then caught his companion's eyes.

"Don't you know him?"

"He has a shape like the handsome doctor's."

"What a guesser you are. You are right."

"It is Doctor Doom."

"Dallas, the Magic Doctor," answered Sarah. "I knew him the moment I set eyes upon him. He is out for business; don't you see what sly glances he steals toward this building? He knows that we are here, and the moment we show ourselves we will have him at our heels as before."

"Let us give him something to do, then," suggested Kimball. "He looks cold, though the sun is well up."

"No; we can't let him watch us to Royal Flush's house. Why not give him the slip? You will see him again. Don't think that man will abandon the trail after having seen you come out of old Marius' den. Not he!"

They went back to the room below and passed through it to the rear of the premises, where they glided into an alley and came out upon another street, a few rods away.

"I will pay my compliments to him some other time," smiled Kimball.

"He is out on a man hunt. He went first to your house this morning. He was in your room."

"You know this, Sarah?"

"I know it. He came away without finding you, but he left a trap set."

"That man did?"

"That man. You don't know Doctor Doom."

"But why should Doctor Doom hunt me down? I never put a straw in that man's road."

A strange look came at once into Sarah Sharp's eye. She turned upon the detective, and for a moment did not speak.

"He knows what you have done. Doctor Doom, the father of the viperess with the baleful eyes, would not be out to-day in that garb if you had put no straws in his way. But come."

Kimball Keene and Sarah Sharp at once were hurrying away, and in less than twenty minutes the street pilot ran nimbly up a flight of three steps before a well-to-do house, and seized the handle of the door.

She did not knock, as if she had no need to, but opened the door, which was not locked, and the city Clew-Hawk entered the hall.

She led him nearly to the end of the corridor, which was not very light, and stopped at another door.

"He is in here," said she, in a whisper, and Keene followed her into a chamber where the curtains were drawn close, and which was dimly lighted, after the manner of sick-rooms.

The detective perceived a half-recumbent figure on a sofa, and noticed that the man had his face bandaged, and was looking at them over a black handkerchief which he had pulled from his eyes.

The features of this man were not distinguishable, but as the detective advanced, he sprang erect, and the eyes flashed their anger.

Sarah Sharp, extending her hand, stepped between the two men.

"It is all my doings," she explained. "I brought him here, Royal. I wanted you to see him."

"What! To see that man?" was the response. "I have no business with him."

"You know him?"

"I know him—all I care to. He is Kimball Keene, the ferret. He is now on a trail which I may be interested in. I don't wish to see him, and if you brought him here to hear me talk, why, you have your trouble for your pains, woman."

The female detective made no reply, but looked steadily at Flush until he got through.

"Won't you show him your face, Royal?" she asked.

"What right has he to see a face disfigured for life? What good will it do him?"

Royal Flush put up his hand as if to tear away the oiled bandage, but the next moment he dropped it again.

"No! Take him away!" he exclaimed. "You brought him here to hear the story I will not tell."

He went back to the sofa, and for several moments sat there in silence.

Sarah stepped forward, and, bending over him, said in low tones, as her hand dropped like a snowflake upon his shoulder:

"No other man can fully avenge you. This is the only one in the world who can strike the hand that disfigured you for life. Talk to him, I earnestly beseech you!"

A shudder passed over the young athlete's frame, and he slowly turned toward the detective.

"I saw you once in the house on H— street," said he, after a pause. "It was when I hammered the iron door down."

"I remember the night. It was a stubborn door."

"But down it came. We found the girl in the laboratory imprisoned like a toad in its rock. I've been to the house since."

Sarah Sharp gave the detective a quick glance. Was the confession near at hand?

"I have been in that accursed room. You see what I got for going there."

He passed his hands over his face, and ended by pulling down the bandages.

"Look!" said he, through set teeth. "Take a look at the changed face of Royal Flush."

Sarah Sharp lifted the lamp from the table, turned the light on a little more, then held it close to the young man's face while Kimball Keene bent forward and looked.

It was a face scarred and burned everywhere. There were open wounds almost black, and great gouts of dark blood here and there. It almost made the stout-hearted detective shudder.

"Not quite as handsome as I used to be," continued the athlete, with a hideous grin. "I wouldn't be a shining light in society just now. No, no! Gods! I thought I was on fire when the infernal chemicals struck my skin, and they penetrated like molten lead. I was alone in the laboratory, on business."

"And something burst unawares, Mr. Flush?"

"Unawares? Not altogether," and the grin was reduplicated. "No, not unawares. I was alone there, I say. I went thither for a purpose, which is neither here nor there—"

"Tell it all, Royal," interrupted Sarah Sharp.

"Perhaps it would be best. I can't see to hunt the villains down myself. That is out of the question now. I heard footsteps behind me, and looked around. Into the chamber came a young girl. We stood face to face a moment, when I saw her hand drop to her pocket, and then I caught her wrist. I had to drop the phials I had just taken from the little cupboard in the wall. She struggled like a tigress, and I wanted to hold her. But in the melee she snatched up one of the phials, and the next instant it had broken in my face! Oh! the horrors of that moment! I was on fire! The tortures of the lost were mine, while she sprang back and laughed as I fell against the table, and dropped through a lake of flame, as I thought. When I came to she was gone, and I was alone. I managed to hide my face and creep home, to be discovered by that woman yonder, who knows more about my past than any other living creature. She—the young tigress encountered in the laboratory—may have been paying me back for my little trick played at her home; but I believe she had deeper motives than that. Open the little desk yonder, Sarah. Thanks; that's it. Now, bring me a package wrapped in dark paper. Ah, this is the secret keeper, Kimball Keene. Here is the phial of the Red Death! This is the weapon that sent Raymond Rolfe beyond the borders of time!" And Royal Flush placed in the detective's hand a phial almost full of little globes, in each of which glowed a reddish liquid.

"That is it," he went on. "You may have seen it before. You remember the night you went alone to the H— street house? You recall how you found a phial similar to this and placed it on the table in the laboratory, while you paid some at-

tention to a veiled woman in the rooms below? Well, that is the same phial. I had the pleasure of robbing you in turn. I had the honor of balking the best detective in New York, little dreaming, Kimball Keene, that I would ever place it in your hands.

A little laugh rippled over the withered lips of Royal Flush, and he watched the phial a second in the detective's hand.

"It is yours," he went on. "I never thought to give it up to you. I was keeping it for a little revenge of my own. I saw a gold-mine ahead. I had in my power certain people while I held on to that phial. They know it now, if she has unsealed her lips. You will probably ask me who killed Raymond Rolfe, and I will have to tell you that I don't know. The secret is kept by that phial. Force it from it, and there you are! Now, please leave me to my tortures and to my darkened life."

Royal Flush turned his head and buried his bandaged face in his hands.

Sarah Sharp crossed the room, followed by the Clew-Hawk of Gotham.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE TOILS OF THE UNKNOWN.

About the same hour of these events Oriel Orne stood in her little dressing room on the second floor of her home in Fourteenth street.

She was looking over some papers which she had just taken from a drawer in the bureau, and evidently thought she was not observed, for the door stood ajar, and Floralia, the maid, was the only other person in the house.

Oriel heard in the hall without a footstep and turned to see flit past the door a figure which brought a flush of sudden anger to her face.

Darting out into the corridor she bounded after the person who had caught her eye, and in a little time she reached a door which had just been closed with a bang.

She was at the door of Floralia's room and the maid behind it refused to open to her mistress.

For a moment Oriel demanded admittance, but there was silence within, and at last she withdrew.

She could not look beyond the portal; she could not see the tall figure of the maid as she stood in the middle of the room, clutching a long knife with a slender blade which seemed to taper to a deadly needle point.

Floralia's eyes were on fire; her bosom rose and fell excitedly, and she glared at the locked door with all the fire of a she-wildcat.

A strange being was Floralia. Raymond Rolfe had secured her to wait on his protegee, and while she and Oriel had managed to get along without jars, Oriel had never liked her.

More than once she had come home to find the maid out, and she had heard a stealthy footstep in the corridors at night, as if a cat were creeping by along the wall, on evil bent.

Then, Floralia had always refused to give her mistress any account of her past; she had refused to say what she knew about Raymond Rolfe; but, at the same time, she seemed to have visited him at the house on H— street, and to have watched him prepare some of his deadly chemicals.

Oriel, on the other hand, had been inclined to take these stories of Floralia's with some grains of allowance, but had not openly disputed them, and Raymond Rolfe had never mentioned the maid's visits to her.

When Oriel left the closed door after chasing Floralia into her chamber, she went back to her own room and soon afterward proceeded down-stairs.

All that day Oriel Orne kept indoors.

She wanted to see Floralia, but the strange, dark-faced maid refused to show herself.

Night came.

Oriel had listened with anxious senses for the feet of her maid on the stairs, but had heard nothing of them.

Floralia was still in her prison.

By and by Oriel went up-stairs and listened at the door of the maid's room. She heard no sound beyond it, and concluded that Floralia had fallen asleep and would not show herself until morning, or until the mad spell had spent its force.

All at once the fall of a heavy body startled the young girl in the parlor and she bounded up the broad steps for the fifth time. The noise seemed to have come from the maid's room; but, when she reached the door it was as solid as before and she got no response when she called Floralia's name.

For a moment Oriel thought of summoning the police or some one strong enough to force the door, and with a smile she thought of Royal Flush and his hammer, but at last she went back, determined to wait a while longer.

By and by Oriel heard no sounds at all; the night pedestrians seemed to have entirely deserted that locality, and she dropped asleep amid the silence and the warmth of the parlor.

When she awakened her first thought was of the locked door up-stairs and she went up once more.

It stood wide open now.

With eagerness she sprang across the threshold.

A light was burning on the dressing stand, the drawers of which were open and ransacked, and there were, on every hand, evidences of hasty flight.

Floralia was gone. After serving her in her strange manner for three years she had departed without warning, and Oriel stood amid the trumpery which she had overturned and looked upon it all.

What had brought about the maid's departure?

Oriel could not guess, but, as she was turning from the scene a bit of white paper which protruded from beneath an ivory comb-case on the dresser caught her eye.

In an instant Oriel had drawn it forth and with distended eyes was reading to herself as follows:

"Floralia—The time has come and you must come to me. If you are interfered with come despite everything. I need you. Keep the secret and come. "DELLA."

The last name Oriel spoke aloud and with pale face.

There was to her but one "Della," and that was the Magic Doctor's daughter; but what right had she to command Floralia to desert her (Oriel) and come to her?

Floralia had evidently forgotten to destroy the note at once, or else had left it on the dresser for a purpose, hardly the latter, and she read it three times before she laid it down.

Oriel's brain seemed in a whirl. Floralia had taken but few things with her—had departed while she slept in the parlor and already was far away, or with Della Doom.

Oriel thought of Bastien. He might solve the mystery. He ought to hear of this queer freak of the mad maid's, and, as he was doubly interested in the solving of the crime of the recluse's house, he might be able to take up the clew from the note left on the dresser and discover something startling.

Then, there was Kimball Keene! Why not carry the news to him, first?

"I will," decided Oriel. "I know where he is to be found and he shall see the letter first."

She dressed hastily for the street and in a few moments was on her way.

It did not take her long to halt in front of the detective's rooms, near Broadway, and presently she was at the door.

No one answered her rap.

Oriel rapped again and again, with increasing loudness, but drew off, at last, perplexed.

There was a long corridor running from her toward the front of the building in which the Clew-Hawk roomed, and she was turning from the door when she saw a figure take shape at one end of the passage.

Oriel Orne felt her heart leap into her throat while she watched the strange object which came down the white wall like a burglar, and, standing spellbound at the Clew-Hawk's door, she waited her doom, as it were.

Nearer and nearer came the gliding figure with the certainty of fate itself.

The girl had no weapon of defense about her; her hands were her only help and they were slender and white, if not nerveless, at her sides.

All at once the girl saw that the face of the figure in the hall, and barely ten feet away, was concealed by a dark mask which fell downward to the chin.

She thought she caught sight of a pair of gleaming eyes, but was not certain; at any rate she was sure she had come upon the hunting ground of some enemy of Kimball Keene's, and that he was going to inquire into her presence there.

It was evident that she had been seen by the unknown.

He did not stop, but, having come from his corner like a spider from the dark recesses of her web, he was creeping upon the fly breathlessly awaiting her doom.

Oriel threw out her hands as the startling object came within reach and commanded him to halt.

There was a sudden stop on the part of the strange one and the eyes in the head behind the mask certainly blazed.

The gloved hands of the unknown did not touch her. On the contrary, they seemed to have been stowed out of sight for a purpose, and the most startling thing she saw was the fascinating look from the eyes.

A singular feeling like that of irresistible drowsiness seemed to be taking possession of her.

She tried to move, but could not. As if glued to the spot where she had halted, she found that all volition was fleeing away, and that she was passing into the power of those all-fascinating orbs.

She thought of fifty things at once—of Bastien Blue, of Kimball Keene, Floralia, and even Sarah Sharp—but these grew confused in her mind, and she passed into the net of the human spider.

All at once she seemed to be sinking down, down upon air; she was conscious of a touch at her wrist, a burning hand there, but she could not shake it off.

That was all Oriel remembered.

When she came back to life she was in a strange place.

There was a high ceiling overhead, walls covered with dark paper, a soft carpet on the floor, no pictures, a table in the middle of the strange room, and herself lying upon a sofa with a crimson covering.

Where was she?

By degrees she recalled the scenes in the hall which skirted the Clew-Hawk's door.

She remembered the creeping figure which came down the corridor, spider-like; she saw the velvet mask and the burning eyes behind it; she felt again the hot fingers at her wrist, and instinctively looked down to see if they had left any marks there.

To her astonishment there was a mark on the white skin; it looked as if a burning coil had encircled her wrist, and while she gazed a spark of fire seemed to run round the marked member.

Oriel sprang up and rushed toward the only door she saw. It was at the far side of the room, and with eagerness bordering on frenzy she seized the knob and gave it a wrench.

But, like the iron door before Royal Flush broke it down, it was immovable, and she fell back with a cry of despair.

She was not in the Clew-Hawk's room. There was nothing about the place to make her think that she had been carried into the detective's place by the mysterious man.

No; she was elsewhere—perhaps in the snare of the enemy!

Oriel went back to the sofa and for a moment seemed about to sink upon the crimson cushion senseless; but she shook off the feeling by a mighty effort and resolved to be cool and collected.

She glanced at her watch and saw that the hands denoted the hour of midnight.

She must have been there two hours.

Oriel crossed the room once more, determined to get some reasons for her imprisonment.

She beat the door with her hands, which she clenched, and then stopped to listen.

Nothing rewarded her.

She might be in a deserted house, but no; there were the light and the furniture.

She went to work again; she caught up a book which lay on the table and used it for a portal opener.

At last there came to her hearing a sound outside the door.

"Silence!" cried a voice outside.

Oriel's face almost touched the door as she asked:

"Where am I and why am I here?"

There was a low laugh, and then a reply:

"You are where you will pass the remainder of your life unless you do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Confess that you killed Raymond Rolfe the night they found you in the laboratory."

Oriel's answer was a wild cry of horror.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MAGIC DOCTOR'S PERIL.

No wonder the imprisoned girl fell back with blanched face and a cry of horror.

Confess that she killed her benefactor? Confess that she had sent Raymond Rolfe before the Great Judge before his time?

For a moment she stood at the door, and then went back shivering to the sofa.

The voice out there had a familiar sound, and she listened for it while she breathed hard.

Who had spoken? Surely she had heard those tones before, and she tried to think where and on what occasion.

All at once Oriel with a bound crossed the room and put her lips to the closed portal.

"Are you there yet?" she asked.

"I am waiting for your answer, girl."

There was no immediate reply by Oriel Orne, and she seemed to listen with all the intensity of despair.

"What have you to say?"

"I am innocent—innocent before Heaven! I never took that man's life!"

Her words were answered by a derisive laugh, and footsteps for a moment receded down the hall.

"He is gone," thought the girl.

But they soon came back.

"Then you perish where you are! You will not purchase your freedom."

"Not in that infamous manner."

"Very well, girl."

"But wait," cried Oriel, who heard the footsteps recede again. "I want to talk with you. Open the door!"

"Not now, my bird."

"Are you the person I saw in the corridor outside the detective's door?"

"Oh, you were there, then?"

"I saw you there. I know it. I fell into your hands by the display of your magic powers, and—"

"Never mind. This need not be continued. You will not confess—"

"No, no! I will not—"

"Then take the consequences."

For the third time the steps went away and Oriel returned to the sofa on the other side of the grim chamber. She felt that she was in the meshes of a death-net—that she had fallen into the power of some demon who intended to fasten upon her that terrible crime of the night of the fourth!

The very horror of the situation seemed to freeze her blood.

Some time passed; she knew not how long, and she suddenly awakened from a deep slumber.

The room was dark, and she started up, forgetting for a moment where she was.

Groping her way through the darkness, she found a table, and as she touched it a glimmer of light that seemed to come from above, fell athwart it, and a folded note lay at her very hand.

Oriel picked it up and opened it with feverish eagerness. The writing was strong and familiar at the first glance.

But her brain reeled while she read it, for every word seemed to burn itself into her mind, and she tottered back.

It was Bastien Blue's handwriting; there was no doubt of that, for every word bore its well known peculiarities, and Oriel Orne almost cried aloud in the agony of the supreme moment.

When she recovered, she came back to the table, and holding to it with one hand, read the following:

"Oriel Orne—I have, against my inclinations, discovered evidences of your guilt. There cannot be the shadow of a doubt, and your only way to clemency is to confess that you took his life, perhaps under great provocation. Come out boldly and tell the truth. We know that the blood of Raymond Rolfe is on your hands, and I will do all I can for you in the moment of your peril. But, tell the truth. Confess that you are the guilty one, and face the world with the terrible story. Do this at once, for unless you do the meshes of guilt will hold you forever."

"BASTIEN BLUE."

The poor girl, with her brain reeling, threw her hands to her head and let the paper drop at her feet.

Believed to be a murderess by Bastien Blue? Charged with the murder of Raymond Rolfe by the man she loved, despite his little eccentricities, and branded a felon by that man! It was too much.

She thought no longer of the accursed note which had been left on the table while she slept.

He must have been in the house. Perhaps he had connived at her abduction, and, if he had not had an actual hand in bringing her to the unknown house, he knew all about it, and was in the plot.

Oriel went to the door again and listened, but all was still outside.

She tried the latch, but it was like adamant, and, for a moment, despairing of ever getting out again into the sunlight, she struggled back to the friendly sofa and fell there in a swoon.

When she came out of the faint a streak of daylight lay across the carpet, but the room was still well tenanted with shadows and she was its sole occupant.

Another day had come. What would it bring her?

Oriel waited for breakfast, and at last the door opened a little, causing her to spring up and dart toward it. But it was shut before she could reach it, and a tray containing meats and drink had been placed on the floor.

Truly, she was a prisoner in that house.

Her eyes fell upon the note she had dropped upon the carpet, and she picked it up to read it again.

Yes, Bastien Blue must have penned it. But why? He had professed belief in her innocence; he had told her that he would fight out her battles, and give her more than half the money the will gave him; he had declared that he believed the will to be a forgery, and that he would be the first to try to prove it so.

But what had taken place to shake his faith in her? Why had he penned that terrible letter, charging her with murder and calling for a confession of blood-guiltiness?

Meantime, in another part of the city, Royal Flush, whom we saw last with Kimball Keene and Sarah Sharp, was seated at a table in his own apartment.

His disfigured face looked still more horrible, as the wounds seemed edged with black, and his eyes were red and swollen.

He had called in no doctor. He was his own doctor, caring for himself, and nursing his vengeance even while he wondered if he would not be better dead than wearing a countenance at sight of which the stoutest man would shudder.

It was about the same hour of Oriel Orne's second reading of the startling note. Royal was alone. He had been alone ever since the departure of the detective and his female partner, and now at the table, with a pen in his hand, he was

slowly and painfully tracing on a sheet of paper lines which straggled, for his hand trembled and his eyesight was not good.

Every now and then he paused and looked up to groan and clench his hands.

The pain was intense, almost overpowering, and he felt it in every nerve and muscle.

"They won't come back for some time, if they come at all," he said aloud to himself. "Sarah Sharp with her falcon eyes stands before me now, and it was she who made me tell the detective what I knew. I am going to die here—to die in this house without help and with no one near."

"Well, isn't it best? Why drag out a miserable existence with such a face as I have, with that terrible acid eating its way even now deeper and deeper? That girl must have known what was in that phial. She had been there before. I know that. She did not expect to find me in the laboratory, but I was there. I saw her eyes flash when she saw the two phials, and she picked up the deadliest one. She knew something about the secrets of the laboratory. She knew a good deal about Raymond Rolfe's poisons and chemicals, and why shouldn't she? It was her business. Yes, that's it—her business!"

He laughed a wild, hollow laugh, which sounded strangely in that place, and went back to his work.

Again the pen traveled slowly across the paper, stopping now and then, as some spasm of pain shot through his mutilated face, and at last he threw down the pen.

"I can't finish it," said he, looking at what he had written. "I haven't the strength, with this terrible pain, to finish. It is but half completed, but there is a man who can guess the rest, and what he can't guess she will tell him. She knows a good deal about me. Ah, Sarah Sharp is a cool one, and she didn't miss her calling when she became a female Vidocq."

Royal Flush leaned back in his chair a moment and shut his teeth hard.

He was struggling with himself, fighting a deep mental battle, in the end to come out but half conqueror.

He folded the paper, and inclosed it in a large envelope, which he addressed to Sarah Sharp; then he placed it underneath a paper-weight.

In another minute he had walked across the room and opened a sideboard there.

With eager clutch he carried to the table a bottle of wine, some of which he poured into a glass. He took from an inner pocket a little phial, almost flat, which he opened and held above the goblet.

"I knew just what to carry off when I went to the laboratory," he laughed. "It is a good thing that I took this phial before she saw me, else I would never have taken it."

Drop after drop of the reddish liquor in the phial fell into the wine, turning it a deeper crimson, and at last Royal placed the little bottle upon the table.

He took a seat and gazed upon it a moment and seemed to smile grimly as he contemplated the change of color.

Suddenly a rap sounded at his door. His hands caught both glass and phial, and while the latter was thrown across the room, to fall unbroken upon the soft carpet, he lifted the former to his lips.

"Knock on!" hissed he. "You can break down the door by and by, just as I broke down the iron portal. But you won't find my door so stubborn. Yes, knock on. I think I know who you are. I don't care about seeing you, Bastien Blue."

There was a cessation of the knocks, and Royal Flush's hand paused on its way to his mouth.

"You don't care to ruin your knuckles on my door, eh?" he laughed. "I believe I will see you. I have a mind to let you look at your old servant's face, for you won't see another like it in a year's travel."

He set the glass down and went over to the door.

His hand at the handle seemed to pause a moment, as if he was rapidly changing his mind, but, all at once, he turned the key in the lock.

"Here I am—Heavens!" cried Royal,

as he opened the door, and confronted, not Bastien Blue, but quite another person.

"I see," was the reply, as the visitor stepped into the room and walked toward the table, still looking at Royal Flush with eyes that seemed to pierce him through.

Royal turned from the door after shutting it, and watched his caller. He was a tall, well made man, with a handsome beard of glossy black, and he had stopped near the table.

"You didn't expect me?" said the caller.

"No," answered Royal, pulling up his bandage, which acted as a vizor. "I wasn't looking for you, Doctor Doom; but, since you're here, I want you to look at my face."

There was a sparkle in the eyes of the Magic Doctor, and he waited for Royal to continue.

Bastien Blue's factotum stepped up to the table and turned on the light a little more. He dropped into a chair and lifted his half-hidden face to Doctor Doom.

"Take off the bandages," said Dallas Doom.

With a grimace of pain, Royal did so, and, in an instant, there came to the spectator's face a look of fiendish joy.

Doctor Doom bent closer and looked keenly at the terrible sight thus exposed, and seemed to smile at the wretched man's affliction.

"You know who did it, don't you?" asked Royal.

There was no reply, for Doctor Doom had placed the tip of his finger into one of the ugly gaps to see the victim shrink back with a sudden cry of agony.

"I say you know who did it?" repeated Royal, quitting the chair and standing erect before the Magic Doctor, his eyes aflame with rage and his whole form in a quiver.

"Your daughter gave it to me, square in the face," he went on. "The pretty serpent who stings men till they die threw at my eyes the deadly phial of the recluse chemist. She did it, I say."

"And what did you try to do? Sit down!"

But Royal Flush did not move, although the mesmeric eyes of the speaker were riveted upon him with all their power.

"Take that chair. I want to talk to you."

"You? You mean you want to throw round me your infernal power. I will not!" The final word seemed to end in a roar, and, hard upon its utterance, Royal Flush bounded forward, and, clutching Doctor Doom by the throat, carried him by main strength across the room and pinned him struggling against the door.

In vain did the Magic Doctor struggle; he was a child in the hands of the young athlete.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LODESTONE OF GUILT.

Miss Della Doom had been to the window of the parlor of the Magic Doctor's mansion for the twentieth time in an hour, and she stood there once more, with her willowy figure half immersed in the rich curtains and her anxious face turned toward the street.

It was ten o'clock at night.

Whenever she heard wheels in the street her face lighted up with hope, only to fade away when the vehicle had passed the house, and whenever she caught the sound of feet on the pavement her dark eyes would glow with pleasure, but, as before, the look would vanish and one full of blank despair take its place.

"I must see what keeps him," she cried at last. "I must find out where he is."

Going up to her dressing-room she soon came back habited for the street, after which she opened the front door and glided out.

No one seemed to be on the watch.

With a hasty glance over her shoulder she hurried off, her footsteps sounding in the night and her figure looking like the tripping figure of a ghost.

She did not stop until she dodged into the narrow passage between Raymond Rolfe's house and its neighbor, and there she vanished.

She must have expected to find her father in that house, now bearing a number which thenceforth would have a crimson record in the annals of Gotham.

Della had means for getting into the place, and in a short time she stood in the dark hallway, feeling her way to the right hand door, which she found unlocked.

She knew where she was, did this girl.

Entering the room of the crime, she paused and listened. In that house she could hear many sounds, but just then she seemed to be the only tenant.

"I can't hear him," she said to herself. "He may be up-stairs, in the laboratory."

She slipped from the room to the stairs and stopped there, looking up into dense darkness, while again she listened intently.

No sounds as before.

"I haven't been in the laboratory since—"

She checked herself as the recollection of her startling encounter with Royal Flush in the room of the deadly chemicals rushed across her mind, and for a moment she drew back.

"Pshaw! What am I here for?" she exclaimed. "Now is the very time for nerves," and she bounded up the stairs, her feet making no noise on the carpet, and in a little while she stood at the door of the laboratory.

"Not yet! Father can't be here. But I wonder if the other man still tenants this place."

It was a query which she sought to answer by the blaze of a match, for she took one from her pocket and struck it on the nearest wall.

The light flashed up and eagerly Della bent forward with her gaze fastened upon the floor at the round table.

There was nothing there. Yes, there was a darkish stain where she had seen Royal Flush sink down; that was all.

She seemed relieved for a moment; then a pallor of fear came to her face.

Had he recovered and crept from the house to expose her to the police, or to take vengeance in a manner more horrible still?

She did not know what to think as she stood there.

"Not here! In the name of Heaven what became of him? Has father carried the body off to screen me?"

She carried the match over to the table with more nerve than she had yet displayed and held it close to the splotch on the floor.

It was blood!

When she rose she stood for half a minute speechless in the middle of the laboratory, with the shelves around her and the crucibles and retorts in their proper places.

"I must go back. No one is here. When father comes home he may clear up this little mystery, for if Royal Flush did not survive, Doctor Doom knows what became of him."

Della went to the lower floor and re-entered the room of the strange death.

There she lit a lamp and shaded it with a book.

The light fell upon the wall near the secret button, which used to unfasten the laboratory door, and all at once the young girl's gaze happened to rest there.

"Who's been here?" she exclaimed, springing forward and halting near the wall.

She was looking at a spot from which the wallpaper had been deftly removed. It was about as large as a man's hand, and she could see how the knife had been thrust underneath the paper, stripping it off, for a purpose.

The sight seemed to rivet her to the spot, and she looked at it, while her face lost color and her lips seemed to quaver.

"They've cut it out!" said she. "Who did it—the man or the woman?"

She had picked up the lamp and was holding it close to the wall.

Her hand shook when she restored the light to the table, and she dropped into a chair.

"I see. They are at work, both of them. And I had Sarah Sharp in my hands. I held her there for hours and might have prevented this."

Once more her eyes went back to the cut-out piece, and for a second she saw nothing else.

She recalled the time when Sarah Sharp met her in the back room of the restaurant, and when she caught her wrist, preventing her from using the needle-pointed dagger which she gripped in her hand.

She went back over the past and thought of how this same woman had come to their house as a spy and how she had repeatedly listened and watched at her door.

She had missed her victim; she had failed to carry out her plans, and now she believed that the cunning of Sarah Sharp, the female Vidocq, had been at work in the old house.

Della remained silent in the chamber for nearly half an hour, brooding over the matter, when suddenly she cried:

"What's that? Some one's in the house besides myself!"

She put out the lamp; then, drawing her dagger, she braced herself near the door and waited.

Her quick ears had detected the sound of some one's feet beyond the room. She was sure she had heard a door open and close.

Della Doom, the doctor's daughter, had all her nerves now. Whatever had become of them the previous minute, they were with her now, and she was as cool as when she had listened at Sarah Sharp's door in her father's house.

But she longed to see who had come like herself to the house of the strange death.

Sounds were emphasized by being put forth in that house, and she believed she could have heard a cricket in the attic.

For ten minutes Della Doom waited in the dark with all her senses on the alert.

Now she thought she heard some one up-stairs and now he seemed to be slipping toward the door which she could have touched from where she stood.

But the unseen did not enter the room of the crime.

Suddenly, however, Della heard a sound which came to her in the shape of a deep long-drawn groan.

"What was that?—a groan?" she exclaimed, moving toward the door, the handle of which she caught eagerly, but held it without opening the portal.

"It was up-stairs! Was it in the laboratory?"

At once she slipped into the hall, stopped at the stairs and looked up. A faint light was seen, where the laboratory was, but no sound came down to tell her who was up there.

"Come, Della Doom, you must inquire into this," cried the girl. "You must see who is up there. Everything may depend upon discovering who is up there. All may hinge on the identity of the person overhead."

The shining steel of the needle-pointed dagger was obscured by her arm as she crept up the steps and neared the top of the carpeted flight.

"I can look into the laboratory from the head of the stairs," she thought, and without hesitation she proceeded up the stairs and paused on the steps near the head.

There was a dim light in the laboratory, and by it she beheld a human figure bending over one of the benches with a hand outstretched toward a cupboard set in the wall.

"'Tis he!" cried the young girl, "and now I can tell him what I know."

At this juncture the figure in the laboratory turned and she knew that she had found her father.

Doctor Doom did not see his daughter crouched on the stairs, nor did he dream that he was watched by her.

Della watched him take from the cupboard a tiny phial, which he held between him and the light.

"He has come here for that phial," she

said to herself, but he put it back. "No, it wasn't for that one."

He found another which he examined as before, but this time he did not return it to the cupboard.

His face was pale above the black beard and his eyes had an unnatural light.

"I'll meet him now," decided Della, as she rose, for Doctor Doom had turned toward the door.

She sprang up and planted herself in the corridor. He could not reach the steps without meeting her.

He carried the lamp in his hand as he came down the corridor, and all at once Della drew back and hugged the wall, white-faced and breathless!

Doctor Doom, walking like a man in a trance, did not see his child.

He glided toward the little room of the forbidden books at the other end of the hall, and Della, against the wall, watched him flit past with all the gruesomeness of a specter.

Her face was white and ghastly; her eyes seemed to bulge from her head, and her hands tried to bury themselves in the wall behind her.

He passed on into the room, the door of which he shut behind him; but, a minute later, he came out and went down-stairs.

A cold sweat stood out on the forehead of the beautiful demon, but she let him go down without hindrance.

In the room of the crime he set the lamp on the table and drew a chair up to it.

"He is all right now. The trance is over," said Della, seeing this movement. "I can go down to him and talk."

She went down, but paused at the open door and looked inside.

Doctor Doom had already found writing materials somewhere, and was bending over the table, writing with a gloved hand.

Not a sound was heard.

Della waited till she could wait no longer. She glided forward, crossed the threshold and moved round behind her father, yet he had not seen her.

She approached him, and, holding her breath, looked over his shoulder.

A sheet of paper lay before him and the bold black characters stood out like charcoal sentences on a white wall.

Della watched the pen a moment until it paused, and then, with a wild cry, she straightened and glared at him.

Her shriek broke the spell; she fell almost against the wall as the hypnotist turned slowly upon her.

"What have you written there? What have you done?" cried the pallid girl.

He laughed, and with a glance at the sheet, his finger pointed to the writing, at which she looked again.

"Here, let me burn it! You don't know what you have written. You don't know who might find that paper—"

He jerked it from beneath her very hand, and arising and confronting her, his mesmeric gaze transfixed her till she shivered and let the dagger in her grasp fall from her nerveless hand to the floor.

"I am going to save myself," said Doctor Doom, almost sullenly.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END OF THE CRIMSON SKEIN.

"To save yourself?" and Della Doom looked at her father and seemed to smile derisively.

"I have said so—to save myself."

"Are the trail-dogs so near?"

He waved her aside, but she came close to him, beating down his hand, and drawing her figure to its full height in his presence.

"It was you, then," said Della. "It was you who came to this room that night? Well, I am here."

He went back to the table, and again dropping into the chair, drew once more toward him the sheet which he had half covered with writing.

She watched him a moment, and then turned to the door.

"Doom me if you will, by that confession, but remember! Time will come

when I will speak. You cannot silence me. I can tell Bastien Blue all. I can break the vase you have fashioned in your guilt and by your infamous powers."

Doctor Doom sprang up, but it was too late. The girl was gone, and there remained for him nothing but the echo of her last words.

Della passed from the house, and out into the night.

She had barely left the place, when a figure was seen to slip after her, and a man kept her in sight.

She turned the first corner, with her cloak drawn close round her form, and her head bent to the wind, which came from the bay.

Not for a moment did the man behind her lose sight of her; not even when she struck Broadway, and for a time seemed to have lost herself amid the humanity there.

Della Doom hurried home, and, once inside, she ran up-stairs. She soon came down, dressed for the street, but paused a moment in the parlor, where she sat down and wrote on the tablet lying on the green baize of the table.

"Now let the detective play out his hand," said she, speaking, as it seemed, through clenched teeth. "Now let him reach the end of the crimson skein. And you, Sarah Sharp, you should be here at this moment, woman. I would not strike at your heart, but I would startle you!"

Outside stood the man who had shadowed her home. He watched the house until the front door opened and Della Doom came forth once more, and, glancing sharply up and down the street, she moved off, walking rapidly down a quiet street, to pause, after a while, and open a door behind a shade tree.

"He may be living. I am sure he was not in the H— street house to-night, for I looked in the laboratory. If Royal Flush survived my attempt upon his life, I will see him."

She was in Bastien's house, but, as she stepped toward the room where she expected to find its tenant, if he still lived, she heard a door open, and some one came into the hall.

In an instant there loomed up before Della Doom the angular figure of Sarah Sharp.

The woman looked keenly at the doctor's daughter.

"You?" cried the fair demon. "Where is he?"

"He is in yonder. Go and see what your work has done."

Sarah stepped stiffly to one side and pointed toward the room which she had just quitted.

"You have been tracking me?" half-savagely asserted Della, as she passed the woman.

"Not so much as the Red Death," was the reply. "Girl, you have blood on your hands."

"Whose blood, Sarah Sharp?" was the reply.

"Never mind. Go in there and look at your last victim."

Della threw open the door and stepped into the room. It was darkened, but her eyes could single out a tenant who lay back in a chair near the wall—her victim, Royal Flush.

At that juncture the shadower put in an appearance and Sarah Sharp held up a warning finger as he slipped in.

She pointed toward the room and Kimball Keene advanced, but stopped at the door.

The tracker had run Della down.

Sarah Sharp leaned toward the Clew-Hawk and whispered:

"She was bound to come back to her victim some time. There was no keeping her away. She is in there with him," whispered the woman.

"And Royal?"

"He is mad—crazy."

"What?"

"He has met some one in this house within a short time. When I came in he lay against the chairboard, his garments torn and his eaten face cut. He met some one here."

Meantime Della Doom was looking at the face which the light revealed.

It was not like the full, strong face of the young athlete who had blackmailed her. It was a poor, torn and marked face, rendered the more horrible by the work of the broken phial.

She caught him by the shoulder, but the deep-set eyes which stared at her gave her no answer.

"Sarah Sharp, come here!"

At Della's call the female detective entered the room.

"What is the matter with him? He will not speak."

"He is mad."

"No; he is dying; look at those eyes!"

"Your work, miss," mercilessly said Sarah. "Your work, I say. You broke the phial against his face."

Della would have spoken, but at that moment she caught sight of the man who had entered at Sarah's heels.

"The tracker—Kimball Keene!" she cried.

She retreated to a place behind Royal Flush's chair, and from there glared at the ferret with eyes that seemed to emit baleful fires.

Quietly Kimball Keene took from his pocket a package which was well wrapped and upon which the gaze of the white-faced girl became riveted.

He next put down a little ball of red, which rolled half-way across the gently sloping table, and stopped beside the package.

"Is that all you have to show?" asked Della.

Sarah Sharp was watching her like a hawk.

Besides these things the detective laid the bit of wall paper which he had shown to old Marius.

"Anything more, Mr. Keene?"

The coolness of this remarkable girl was exasperating, and there came to Sarah's lips a smile at the detective's expense.

"And this," cried Sarah Sharp, drawing from beneath the folds of her shawl something which fell beside the articles already on the table.

Della started at sight of the last thing, and stared at the female detective.

"You know what it is," quietly said Sarah.

There was a movement of the lips, but no words came forth, and Della remained speechless.

Kimball Keene now picked up the hidden object in its wrappings of brown paper and tore it open.

A cry issued from Della's lips as a human hand fell out and lay, palm upwards, on the cloth.

"You know it?" queried the Clew-Hawk.

There was no reply.

Then he picked up the little glass globe and held it over the hand, still looking at Della.

It was more than coolness and human nature could stand.

The next instant a shriek welled from the girl's throat and she threw up her hands and sank beside Royal Flush's chair.

"You have won," quietly remarked Sarah Sharp. "My package contains the true will, which I found in Doctor Doom's mansion. It gives nearly all of Raymond Rolfe's wealth to Miss Oriel Orne."

"Della suspected, or knew, what you had found. But where is the Magic Doctor himself?"

"Ask that girl when she revives."

They waited for some time and slowly out of the swoon came Della Doom, heart-sickened, spirit-broken—cowed at last.

But, with the astonishing coolness of one who has all her nerves under control, she proceeded to her confession—told how she had frequently visited Raymond Rolfe under the Magic Doctor's instructions, and with one end in view—his death and the forging of a new will which should give all his wealth to Bastien Blue, already in their hands through the doctor's black art.

"I am the real murderess," she admitted. "I knew more about the deadly chemicals of the laboratory than any one beyond that house. I went there that night to kill the man who stood between us and fortune. I stole from the laboratory the phial containing the Red Death. I took two of the globes from it. I appeared to him in his room below. He suspected nothing. I seized his hand. I forced into it one of the little globes. He realized my intention, but it was too late. I shut his hand hard. The glass ball was shattered, and with a cry and a stagger, Raymond Rolfe soon lay on the floor, dead! It was the print of my hand on the wall. I went back afterward, to blot it out, and thought I had done so with the aid of chemicals. My father is now in the house on H— street, or was when I left him. I may have been under his spell when I took the life of Raymond, but I ask no mercy on that account. Bastien Blue was in his power. Bastien Blue would have made me his wife but for you two people."

"You will find Oriel Orne in our house. You will find the girl guarded by Floralia, her maid, whom I called to my side by holding over her head a little secret which is much to her. Sarah Sharp, I regret that I did nothing more than listen at your door while you were 'Susan Blunt,' in our house. As for that man, he would have killed me in the laboratory. He blackmailed me and I had to submit, because he had stolen the phial of the Red Death."

They went to the old house on H— street; they found Doctor Doom at the table where Della had left him, apparently still writing with all his might.

But there was a strange rigidity about the figure, and Kimball Keene stepped to his side. He raised the man's head; there was a blank stare in the black eyes.

Sarah Sharp opened one of the hands and uttered an exclamation as she looked up at the Clew-Hawk.

There was a large red stain in the palm and bits of glass fell upon the table. The man was dead.

At the end of the trail of the Red Death stood the tireless Metropolitan Clew-Hawk, and beside him, her face expressing no signs of victory, stood Sarah Sharp, Detective Keene's Right Bower.

Della Doom never was tried for murder; her health gave way at once, and death soon cheated the noose.

Royal Flush, with his scarred face, shut himself up in a private retreat, while Bastien Blue, true to his love, made Oriel his wife, and they enjoyed a long honeymoon far from the scenes through which they had passed.

For Oriel knew that the accusing letter signed by Bastien had been produced under the hypnotic spell, but realized that now no more would the Magic Doctor play for thousands with Raymond Rolfe's half-brother for an unconscious assistant.

Sarah Sharp left the profession after the unraveling of the mystery of H— street and thereafter devoted herself to little Sparrow.

Few people suspected the ties that existed between the Clew-Hawk and his Right Bower, and not until long afterward was it made known that they were brother and sister.

Old Jozy vanished after the trial, and no person but the Superintendent of Police and Kimball Keene knew whither he went. He was not molested, and no one ever spent another thought upon the old rat of Cherry street.

Kimball Keene had his best reward in the thanks of Oriel Orne; but he always pitied the strong young man who hid his poor scarred face from the world, and the gymnasiums of New York lost their best patron when Della, the beautiful demon, threw the phial into Royal Flush's face in the laboratory of the iron door.

THE END.

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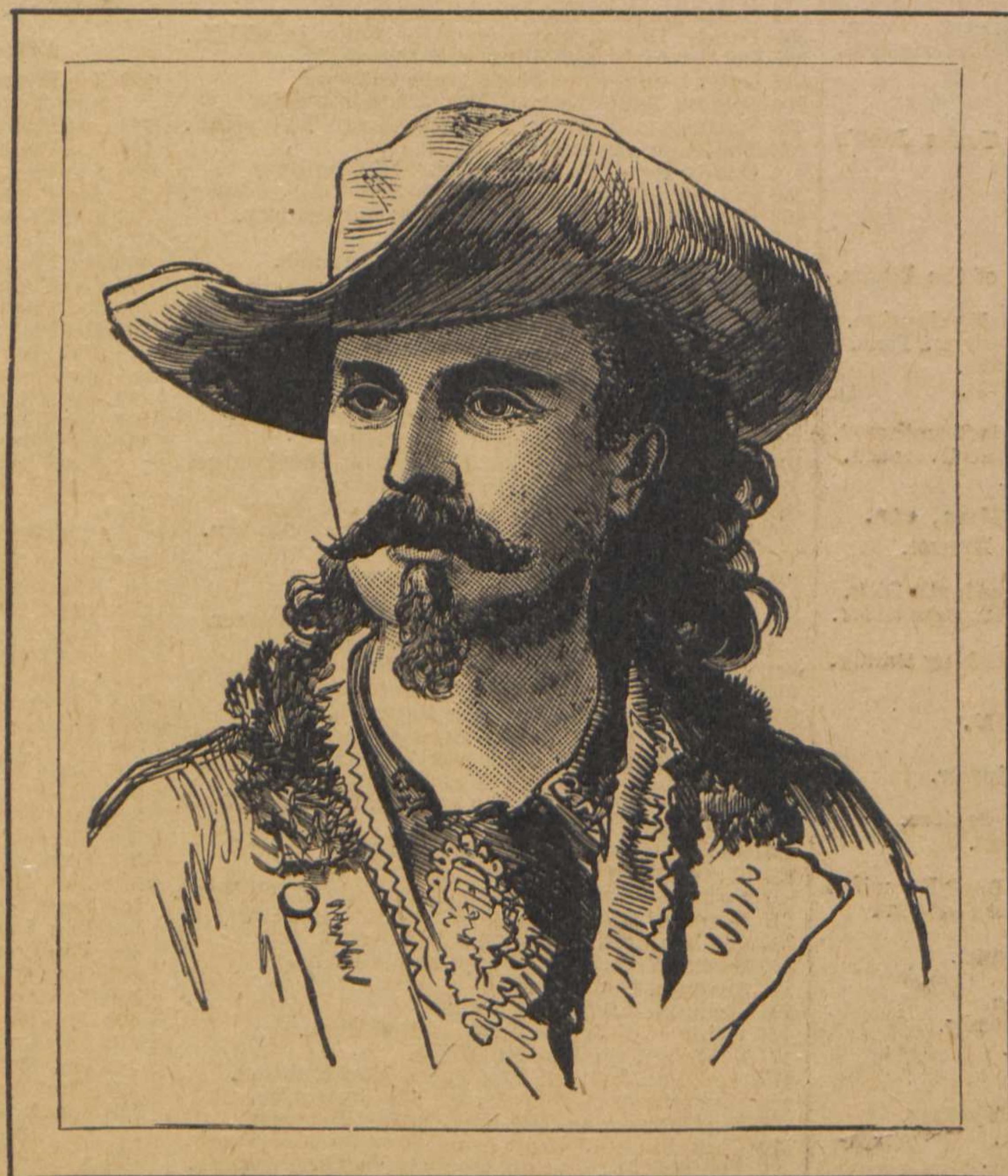
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